

BS1151
.P922
19:1

THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF PSALMS.

THE

✓
Preacher's Complete Homiletical

C O M M E N T A R Y

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN),

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c. &c

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.

London:

RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89 FARRINGDON STREET.

1881.

✓
THE
PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

PSALMS.

VOL. I.

ON PSALMS I.—XXV.

By W. L. WATKINSON;

ON PSALMS XXVI.—XXXV.

By W. FORSYTH, A.M.;

ON PSALMS XXXVI.—XXXVIII.

By JOSEPH S. EXELL;

ON PSALMS XXXIX.—LXXXVII.

By WILLIAM JONES.

SECOND EDITION.

London:

RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89 FARRINGDON STREET.

1881.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

INDEX OF SUBJECTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
ABSENCE from God, a godly soul under a sense of (See SOUL), . . .	206	Anticipation, an encouraging, . . .	496
Access, the good man's, trust, and testimony, . . .	403	the blessing anticipated—deliverance from distresses; exaltation to honour; prevalence of moral excellence, . . .	496
Activity, the beneficent, of God in nature, ...	329	the character of those for whom the blessing is anticipated, is marked by, consecration to God, veneration of God, obedience to God, . . .	497
is incessant, ...	330	Anticipation, the, of the godly soul, . . .	320
omnipresent, ...	330	presents a triple contrast, . . .	320
abundant, ...	330	a contrast of character, . . .	320
joy-inspiring, ...	330	of pursuit, ...	320
Adullam Sermon, an (See SERMON), . . .	160	of destiny, ...	320
Affliction, praising God for His great kindness in (See PRAISING), . . .	335	Antidote, the bane and the (See BANE), . . .	53
prayer the resource of the godly in (See PRAYER), . . .	142	Apologetics of childhood, the (See CHILDHOOD), . . .	29
Afflictions, the, of man, and the help of God, ...	463	Appeal, an earnest, and prayer (See PRAYER), ...	217
Aged saint, the, and his God, . . .	373	Appealing to God, man, ...	13
Aged, the cry of the	374	to His righteousness, faithfulness, mercy. Observe: the blessedness and the conditions of so doing, . . .	13
the phenomena of human decay, . . .	374	Argument of experience, the . . .	319
the reasons of this law of physical decay, ...	375	the rejoicing is reasonable, personal, real, restful, prophetic, . . .	319
the duties which spring out of these facts and considerations, . . .	375	Arts, black, ...	42
Ages, dark, ...	46	selfish men set traps for the young and inexperienced, . . .	42
the golden age of a country may be a dark age in the estimate of the saint, ...	46	the world contrives traps for the godly, ...	42
the faults with which a splendid civilisation may be chargeable . . .	47	Satan sets traps for us all. Let the innocent put their trust in God, and walk circumspectly; let any who are in the snare of the devil look up to the Deliverer; let the wicked be assured that God's eye is upon them, and that justice must overtake them, ...	43
the duty of the Christian patriot . . .	48	Asaph, ...	245, 403
Alamothe, ...	228	Ascension of Christ, the, ...	351
Alive, buried (See BURIED), . . .	145	the fact of, ...	351
Alpha and Omega, ...	28	the triumphs with which it was attended	352
Altar of God, the, ...	212	the inestimable benefits supplied by it, . . .	352
the peculiar nature of that worship which God has authorised, . . .	212	Aspects of Divine worship (See WORSHIP), ...	325
the emphatic description of the joy which results from it, ...	212	Aspects of magistracy (See MAGISTRACY), ...	477
Al-taschith, ...	287	Aspects of piety, three (See PIETY), . . .	156
Ancestors and successors, our relation to our (See RELATION), . . .	441		
Anniversary, for a Sabbath-School, . . .	441		
Antagonistic forces, ...	9		
describe the two states of feelings, fear and joy, ...	9		
these are not incompatible, ...	9		
they are essential to the security and development of the Christian life, ...	9		

	PAGE		PAGE
Aspects of the Divine government (See GOVERNMENT), ...	417	salvation, and full, various, perpetual glories, ...	63
Assurance, a well-founded, ...	213	the ground of his hope, Jesus Christ, ...	63
a commemoration of God's former and glorious doings; the nature, Author, and reason of these doings; the obligation of every generation to transmit to posterity an account of the doings of God in their day, and to profit by the experience of those who have gone before, ...	213	Black arts (See ARTS), ...	42
a declaration of confidence in God, which is worthy of imitation in the ground on which their faith rested, the relationship which He sustained to them, the petition which they present to Him, the renunciation of other objects of trust, their assurance of victory, and their praise of God, ...	214	Blessed life, the (See LIFE), ...	1
Assyrian army, overthrow of the, ...	231	Blessedness of communion with God, the, ...	327
Atheism, practical, ...	40	Blessedness of the Christian's old age, comparative, ...	379
the nature, history, characteristics, and doom of, ...	40	he is happy in the contemplation of his past conduct and influence, ...	380
Atheism, the immorality of, ...	52	in the contemplation of the blessings which have marked his history, ...	380
in its principle, origin, and consequences, ...	52	in the contemplation of his life's history, because of the lessons it has served to teach, ...	380
Attitude of a victorious soul, the, ...	400	in the continued possession of his life's chief good, ...	380
marked by deep self-abasement, ...	400	in the near prospect of realising his life's brightest hopes, ...	380
sublime confidence in God. The Psalmist was assured of the constant presence, the unfailing support, the infallible guidance, the all-sufficiency, and the righteousness of the government of God, ...	401	Blessedness of the compassionate, the (See COMPASSIONATE), ...	202
Attitude of man in a thunder-storm, the true (See THUNDER-STORM), ...	136	Blessedness of the forgiven, the, ...	148
Awful fallacy, an (See FALLACY), ...	251	declared as a doctrine, ...	148
BANE and the antidote, the, ...	53	illustrated as a fact, ...	149
the corruption of the race, universal, thorough, profound, ...	53	confirmed by the experience of the godly in all ages, ...	150
the Deliverer of the race, neither philosophy, education, institutions, nor any restorative principle in human nature, but Christ Jesus, ...	54	Blessings, Divine, ...	446
Banquet, a royal, ...	113	from unlikely sources, ...	446
is provided in the midst of conflict, ...	113	in rich abundance, ...	446
is promotive of abundant joy, ...	113	a type of the supreme blessing, ...	446
will satisfy all the wants of a lifetime, ...	113	Blessing, the Fount of, ...	511
is the type and pledge of the everlasting feast in the heavenly banqueting hall, ...	114	Blessing to the race, Christ as the source of (See CHRIST), ...	101
Barren lot of the wicked, the (See LOT), ...	346	Bow in the cloud, the, ...	75
Beacon, an impressive, ...	263	the supremacy of God's government, ...	75
the moral portrait of a wicked man, ...	263	the discriminativeness of His action, ...	76
remonstrance with a wicked man, ...	263	the tenderness of His methods, ...	76
the doom of a wicked man, ...	264	the effectiveness of His aid, ...	76
Behaving as a friend (See FRIEND), ...	168	the bountifulness of His grace, ...	76
Benedictions of the good, the dispositions and (See DISPOSITIONS), ...	172	Burden and Sustainer, man's, ...	279
Beneficent activity of God in nature (See ACTIVITY), ...	329	man is burdened, ...	280
Besetting sins (See SINS), ...	79	exhorted to cast his burden upon the Lord, ...	280
Beulah, ...	63	encouraged to do so by the assurance of His support, ...	280
the grandeur of the Psalmist's hope, ...		Buried alive, ...	145
		by the malice of enemies, ...	145
		by the neglect of contemporaries, ...	145
		by the lack of opportunities for distinction, ...	145
		by the failure of capacity for usefulness, ...	145
		CALLING of David, the, ...	459
		Causeless hater, the (See HATER), ...	167
		Chain of life, links in the (See LINKS), ...	141
		Challenge to religious hypocrites, God's (See HYPOCRITES), ...	249
		Champion of the good, God the, ...	421
		the enemies of the good are many and mighty, Satan and his allies, the world, enemies within ourselves, ...	421
		the Champion of the good is greater than all their enemies, He goes forth to battle from Zion, to complete victory, with the utmost ease, ...	422

	PAGE		PAGE
the Champion of the good should be duly honoured, vows should be paid to Him, offerings made to Him, victory ascribed to Him alone, . . .	424	the religious capacity of childhood, . . .	29
Character of God, a welcome revelation of the, . . .	170	the religious service of childhood, . . .	30
He is unspeakable in mercy, . . .	170	Choice of our inheritance, the, . . .	234
immutable in rectitude, . . .	170	distrust of self, . . .	234
invites the confidence of the soul, . . .	171	trust in God, . . .	234
is the source of all life, . . .	171	trust in God rewarded, . . .	235
is the protection of the good from the artifices of the wicked, . . .	171	Christ as the source of blessing to the race, . . .	101
Character of true worship (See WOR- SHIP), . . .	154	is exalted to the highest dignity, . . .	101
Character and privileges of the godly, the (See GODLY), . . .	323	endowed with all power, . . .	101
Character and destiny, a terrible, . . .	353	inexhaustible in supply, . . .	101
a terrible character, great enormity and persistency in wickedness, . . .	353	rejoices to communicate, . . .	101
a terrible destiny, destruction, com- plete, unavoidable, solemnly de- clared, . . .	353	Christ, the Ascension of (See ASCEN- SION), . . .	351
Characters, contrasted, . . .	176	Christ, the reign of, . . .	8
the wicked and the good contrasted in their possessions, . . .	176	its sovereignty, . . .	8
in their strength, . . .	176	authority, . . .	8
in their perpetuity, . . .	176	universality, . . .	8
in their integrity, . . .	177	irresistibility, . . .	8
in their posterity, . . .	177	graciousness, . . .	8
Characteristic of a Divine revelation, the (See REVELATION), . . .	48	Christ, the utter overthrow of the ene- mies of (See ENEMIES), . . .	103
Characteristics of a wicked life, the dis- tinguishing (See WICKED), . . .	169	Christ, victory for Christ and victory in, a picture of Christ's victory over His foes, its completeness, rapidity, uni- versality, . . .	85
Chastisement, . . .	20	the saint's victory in Christ, . . .	86
the twofold character of the Divine; the one is measured, the other is overwhelming; the one destroys, the other perfects; the one is tem- poral, the other eternal, . . .	20	Christianity, human nature in the light of Christianity, . . .	32
the grounds of appeal to the Divine clemency, . . .	20	Christianity recognises the intrinsic grandeur of human nature, . . .	32
the Divine response to the prayer of penitence, . . .	21	restores the lost grandeur of human nature, the glory of human charac- ter, the fulness of human dominion, . . .	32
Chastisement, the Divine, conscience awakened by a sense of, . . .	180	Church and her Lord, the, . . .	225
the Divine chastisement is greatly afflictive to men, makes them appre- hensive of the wrath of God, is keen in its penetration into their souls, makes them morally loathsome to themselves, leads them to an over- whelming consciousness of sin, leads them into grievous unrest, divests life of all human joy, . . .	180	exhortation to the Church, . . .	225
the Divine chastisement often tests the sincerity and worth of human friendship, . . .	181	encouragement to the Church, . . .	225
calls into requisition the self-restraint of the good, . . .	181	the glory of the Church, . . .	226
awakens the repentant soul to impor- tunate prayer, . . .	182	the marriage celebration of the Church, . . .	226
Chastisement, man under Divine, . . .	450	the assurances given to the Lord of the Church, . . .	226
sorely smitten, . . .	450	Church, a tumultuous world and a tran- quil, . . .	228
remembering God, . . .	450	the tumult of the world is an evidence of the sin of the world, and will one day be removed, . . .	229
seeking God, . . .	451	the tranquil Church is assured of secu- rity and of refreshment, . . .	229
offering to God utreal repentance, . . .	451	Church, the glory of the (See GLORY), . . .	349
Chequered life, the (See LIFE), . . .	51	Church, the glory of the, a striking illus- tration of, . . .	235
Childhood, the apologetics of, . . .	29	as the city of God, . . .	235
		as exalted before men, . . .	230
		as victorious over enemies, . . .	236
		Church, the glory of the, an instructive illustration of, . . .	237
		the triumphs wrought for the Church should be regarded as a confirma- tion of faith, . . .	237
		an incentive to meditation on the grace of God, . . .	238
		a stimulus to praise God, . . .	238
		a reason for considering the security and beauty of the Church, . . .	238
		an encouragement to triumph in God, . . .	239
		Church a turtle-dove, the, . . .	414
		Church, glorious things spoken of the, . . .	510
		Church of God, the glory of the, . . .	506
		consisted in her sanctity, . . .	506

	PAGE		PAGE
in her security, ...	506	Compassionate, the blessedness of the, ...	202
in being beloved by God, ...	507	he is blessed with Divine deliverance, ...	202
in her exalted reputation, ...	507	preservation, ...	202
in her increase, ...	507	blessing, ...	202
in the joy which her supplies produce, ...	508	reservation, ...	202
Church, passages from the history of		support in affliction, ...	202
the ancient, with their lessons to		Compassionate, the complaint, prayer,	
the modern Church, ...	468	and confidence of the, ...	203
the Divine planting, ...	468	he complains of his enemies, and of	
great progress, ...	469	those whom he had regarded as his	
ruinous failure, ...	469	friends, ...	203
mournful devastation, ...	470	he prays for mercy, and for restora-	
earnest prayer, ...	470	tion, ...	204
devout promise of the ancient Church, ...	471	he is confident of the Divine favour	
Church, the peril and prayer of the, ...	481	and support, ...	204
the peril arose from her enemies,		Complaint, a sorrowful, an earnest	
whose hostility was violent, confi-		prayer, and a devout resolution, ...	459
dent, crafty, aimed at the utter ruin		complaint of the devastation of Jeru-	
of Israel, united, and powerful, ...	481	salem and the desecration of the	
the prayer was for the interposition		temple, of the cruelties inflicted	
of God; the destruction, confusion,		and the reproaches cast upon the	
and submission of their foes to God;		people of God, ...	459
and for the glory of the Divine		prayer, manifests a consciousness of	
name, ...	482	the sins of the people, petitions	
Church, the suffering, pouring out its		God for various favours, urges his	
complaints unto, ...	404	petitions with powerful pleas, ...	460
the description of the Church, it is		resolution, the language of confidence,	
shepherded by God, redeemed by		gratitude, service, ...	461
God, inhabited by God, ...	404	Complaint, the, prayer, and confidence	
the distress of the Church; their ene-		of the compassionate (See COM-	
mies triumphed over and spread		PASSIONATE), ...	203
ruin around them, and blasphemed		Complaint, prayer, and encouragement,	300
the name of God; the prophetic		complaint, great calamities are com-	
voice was silent; God in anger had		plained of, these calamities are	
cast them off, ...	405	regarded as signs of the Divine	
the prayers of the distressed Church;		displeasure, the Divine displeasure	
that God would remember them,		is always the result of human	
and interpose for them speedily, ...	406	sin, ...	300
Church, the suffering, recounting the		prayer, for the restoration of the	
doings of God in the past as an		Divine favour, and the repair of	
argument for His help in the present		their calamities, ...	301
the history of God's dealings with		encouragement, God has given to His	
His people, reveals His universal		people glorious promises, these are	
sovereignty, ...	408	thoroughly reliable, should be	
reveals the beneficence of His sove-		conspicuously exhibited that men	
reignty, ...	408	may trust in them, should inspire	
is full of encouragement to them, ...	409	His people with hope and courage	
Church, the suffering, pleading the		in the time of trial, ...	301
faithfulness and honour of God as		Complaints unto God, the suffering	
an argument for His interposition, ...	411	Church pouring out its (See	
the attitude of their enemies to Him;		CHURCH), ...	404
that they blasphemed and loudly		Confess Him, he that knows God will, ...	197
opposed Him is urged as a reason		Confidence, a triumphant, ...	278
why He should defend His own		its nature, comprehensive, strong,	
cause and that of His people, ...	412	intelligent, ...	278
their own relation to Him; they were		its grounds, the number and character	
His turtle-dove, the congregation		of His enemies, and the ancient	
of His poor, His covenanted		sovereignty of God, ...	279
people, ...	412	Confidence in Jehovah the pledge of	
Church, the triumph of the (See		victory, ...	97
TRIUMPH), ...	347	confidence in Jehovah fills the heart	
Cloud, the bow in the (See Bow), ...	75	with gladness, ...	97
Comfort to His people, the knowledge		inspires with courage for the conflict	97
of God a, ...	286	secures the exercise of His almighty	
Commendable resolution, a (See RE-		power, ...	98
SOLUTION), ...	184	exposes the inadequacy of the best	
Communion with God, the blessedness		human contrivances, ...	98
of, ...	327	turns apparent defeat into victory, ...	98

	PAGE		PAGE
Confidence in God, a life of, . . .	289	are painful to the soul, . . .	394
its grounds, nature, and advantages, . . .	289	are surmounted in communion with	
Confidence of a troubled heart, the		God, . . .	394
(See HEART), . . .	307	Cry for help, a pathetic (See HELP), . . .	108
Confidence of God's goodness to His		Cry from a soul in distress, a (See	
people, the good man's . . .	391	DISTRESS), . . .	273
he indicates the character of God's		Cry of a troubled heart, the (See	
people, and asserts God's special		HEART), . . .	305
goodness to them, . . .	391	Cry of the aged, the (See AGED), . . .	374
Conflict, prayer a preparation for (See		Cry of the righteous in extreme suffer-	
PRAYER), . . .	95	ing, the (See SUFFERING), . . .	357
Conflict, the glorious, . . .	302		
the object of the conflict, . . .	302	DARK ages (See AGES), . . .	46
the character of the soldiers, . . .	302	David, the calling of, . . .	459
the authority of the Commander, . . .	302	David's prayer, . . .	258, 261
Conqueror, the Messiah as a majestic		David's prayer and vow, . . .	258
(See MESSIAH), . . .	222	the petitions, . . .	258
Conquest, full, . . .	81	the predicated results of a gracious	
the fulness, and the source of the		answer, . . .	259
Psalmist's victory, . . .	81	Day of trouble, the (See TROUBLE), . . .	502
Conscience awakened by a sense of the		Decided piety (See PIETY), . . .	292
Divine chastisement (See CHAS-		Declaration of a grateful soul, the, . . .	337
TISEMENT), . . .	180	help in trouble implored by man, . . .	337
Conscience, informed, asleep, aroused, . . .	55	granted by God, . . .	338
Constructive and the destructive, . . .	407	recounted to men, . . .	338
Contemplation of the doings of God, . . .	230	acknowledged to God, . . .	338
the object contemplated, . . .	230	Deliverance, a song of, . . .	109
the design of the contemplation, warn-		this deliverance was celebrated by	
ing of the enemies of the Church, . . .		grateful praise, . . .	109
encouragement of the Church, in-		will be the means of conferring bless-	
struction of all, . . .	231	ing on all mankind, . . .	110
Contemplation of the works and ways		will vindicate the Divine righteous-	
of God, the godly soul rising		ness to future ages, . . .	110
superior to trouble by the devout		Deliverer, the good man's trouble and	
(See TROUBLE), . . .	433	(See TROUBLE), . . .	427
Contrasted characters (See CHARAC-		Departing from God, . . .	402
TERS), . . .	176	Deposit, the great, . . .	143
Contrasted with the peaceful destiny of		Depression, the deep, and strong con-	
the good, the temporary prosperity		solation of a godly soul (See	
of the wicked as, . . .	178	SOUL), . . .	208
wicked men are often in the posses-		De profundis, . . .	73
sion of great power, . . .	178	the Psalmist's peril, . . .	73
often experience unexpected reverses, . . .	179	prayer, . . .	73
the good are happy in their life, and		preservation, . . .	73
peaceful in their futurity, . . .	179	Destinies of men, the, . . .	5
Counsels of wisdom, two, . . .	147	are various, . . .	5
love the Lord, urged by Reason, Grati-		decided by their moral character and	
tude, Experience, . . .	147	conduct, . . .	5
be of good courage, . . .	147	as widely contrasted as their charac-	
Courage, moral, . . .	44	ter, . . .	5
the severity of the trial, . . .	44	Destinies of men, the diverse, manifest-	
the constancy of the tried, . . .	44	ing the reign of God, . . .	297
the certainty of the triumph, . . .	45	the destiny of the enemies of the good,	
Cowardice and its causes, moral, . . .	442	life protracted in misery and ending	
the illustration of moral cowardice, . . .	442	in ruin, . . .	297
the causes of moral cowardice, absence		the destiny of the suffering good, a	
of the support of conscience, the		life of devout and hearty praise to	
inspiration to be drawn from past		God, . . .	298
interpositions of God on their be-		the reign of God manifested in these	
half, and the help of God, . . .	442	diverse destinies, . . .	299
Creation, . . .	28	Destiny, a terrible character and (See	
deriving its glory from God, . . .	28	CHARACTER), . . .	353
revealing the glory of God, . . .	29	Destruction of her enemies, the salva-	
awakening admiration and love in		tion of the Church and the, . . .	269
the children of God, . . .	29	the Poet represents the destruction of	
Crises in the spiritual life, . . .	394	the wicked as utter and irrever-	
are sometimes occasioned by the Pro-		sible, . . .	269
vidence of God, . . .	394	as effected by God, . . .	269

	PAGE		PAGE
as overtaking them when they regarded themselves as quite secure,	269	Earnest supplication, an (See SUPPLICATION),	492
as inflicted because of their hostility to the people of God,	269	Eclipses, soul,	49
in former times as an encouragement to the good to expect salvation from present dangers,	269	the nature of,	49
Destructive, the constructive and the,	407	the cause of, to teach us that God is the source of happiness, wisdom, strength, life,	49
Devout longings (See LONGINGS),	210	the duty of the saints in these hours of darkness, to wait in faith, prayer, and hope,	50
Dignity of human nature, the (See NATURE),	31	Effect, the, upon the righteous of the judgment of God upon the wicked, the righteous behold,	264
Dispositions and benedictions of the good, the,	172	are awed by,	265
dispositions, trust, joy, devotion, rest, patience, meekness,	172	approve,	265
benedictions, watched over by the beneficent providence of God, privileged by the gratification of its best desires, vindicated from the calumny and slander of men, enriched by a true ownership of the earth, shall experience a sweet and affluent peace,	173	are instructed by,	265
Distinction between goodness and mercy,	500	flourish in the midst of,	265
Distress, a cry from a soul in,	273	worship God because of His judgment upon the wicked,	266
the cause of his distress, the evil speeches, wicked deeds, and deadly hatred of his enemies,	273	Encouraging anticipation, an (See ANTICIPATION),	496
the description of his distress, great mental anxiety, deep pain of heart, overwhelming dread,	274	Encouragement, complaint, prayer, and (See COMPLAINT),	300
his desire in his distress, was natural, mistaken, significant,	274	Enemies of Christ, the utter overthrow of the,	103
his prayer in his distress, involves faith in the accessibleness, inextinguishableness, and sufficiency of God,	275	the enemies of Christ, are full of malignity,	103
Distributed, sorrow and mercy justly (See SORROW),	152	will be certainly detected and exposed,	103
Divine blessings (See BLESSINGS),	446	will be stricken with dismay,	103
Divine gentleness (See GENTLENESS),	83	will be utterly overthrown,	104
Divine salvation (See SALVATION),	71	their overthrow will illustrate the supreme power of Jehovah,	104
Doings of God, contemplation of the (See CONTEMPLATION),	230	Enemies, the godly man and his,	282
Doings of God in the past, the suffering Church recounting the, as an argument for His help in the present,	408	the enemies of the godly man, are eager, numerous, constant, dishonest, confederate, secret, and cruel,	282
Doings, the Lord's, for His servant (See SERVANT),	192	the prayer of the godly man in the midst of his enemies, contains a comprehensive petition, a powerful plea, and an earnest appeal,	282
Doxology,	205	the confidence of the godly man in the midst of his enemies, was reposed in the grandest Object, exercised in the most trying season, and produced the sublimest results,	283
blessing is ascribed to God, as a God holding relations with His people,	205	Enough, sincerity not,	129
eternally,	205	Entry of the glorious king, the triumphal (See KING),	117
fervently,	205	Envy of the good, the transient prosperity of the wicked unworthy the (See PROSPERITY),	171
Doxology,	389	Evangelical morality (See MORALITY),	57
the comprehensiveness,	390	Evil for good,	166
perpetuity,	390	innocence calumniated,	166
universality,	390	goodwill repaid with bereavement,	166
intensity of the praise,	390	brotherly kindness requited with hatred,	166
Drawing nigh to God,	403	misfortune met with derision,	166
Dreadful, perdition (See PERDITION),	128	piety made the subject of ribaldry and scorn,	167
Dream, the life of ungodly men a,	399	Evil of sin, the chief evil,	256
characterised by, unreality,	399	consists in its being committed against God,	256
brevity,	399	Evil, the programme of,	3
termination,	400	the evil life in its inception,	3
EARNEST appeal and prayer, an (See PRAYER),	217		

	PAGE		PAGE
development, ...	4	in his realisation of the all-sufficiency of God, in his reliance upon Him alone, in his assurance of safety and stability, and in his rest in God, ...	309
consummation, ...	4	Faith of an aged saint, the triumphant, ...	376
Exemplary praise (See PRAISE), ...	291	the prayer, ...	376
Exhortation of faith, the (See FAITH), ...	310	the anticipation, ...	376
Exhortation, promise, and encouragement, ...	476	the resolution of faith, to continually hope in and praise God, ...	377
Exhortation to praise God, because of His government of the world (See PRAISE), ...	232	Faithfulness and honour of God, the suffering Church pleading the, as an argument for His interposition (See CHURCH), ...	411
Exile's longing for the house of God, the (See LONGING), ...	484	Fallacy, an awful, ...	251
Exile's prayer, the (See PRAYER), ...	488	to suppose that God is altogether like us, ...	251
Exile, the rejoicing (See REJOICING), ...	284	Faults, secret, ...	92
Experience, a painful, ...	215	sins known to ourselves, but not to the world, ...	92
the miseries of which they complain, their rejection by God, their defeat in battle and its consequent evils, the reproaches of their enemies, and their own shame, ...	215	sins known to the world, but not to us, ...	92
the Author of their miseries, ...	216	sins neither known to us nor to the world, but known to God: recognise the guilt of them, seek cleansing for them, ...	92
the instruction which their miseries are fitted to afford, ...	217	Favour implored, the Divine, ...	464
Experience of a godly man, the (See MAN), ...	339	people sorely needing God's favour, because of the reproaches of their neighbours, the rejection of their prayer, and the greatness of their sorrow, ...	464
Experience, the argument of (See ARGUMENT), ...	319	earnestly imploring God's favour, with an implied confession of sin, a recognition of the gracious relation of God to them, and an earnest entreaty for His salvation, ...	465
Experiences, sad scenes and painful (See SAD), ...	276	Fear, and trust in God, times of (See TRUST), ...	283
Experiences, the value of dying, ...	395	Fearlessness of the good, the, ...	129
the calm death of the wicked is no proof of Divine support, ...	395	springs from personal faith in God, ...	129
shrinking and fear on the part of the righteous as they approach death is no proof that the Divine support is withdrawn, ...	395	strengthened by the remembrance of past deliverances, ...	130
the most precious religious testimonies of the dying are poor compared with the testimony of a useful and godly life, ...	395	sufficient for the greatest emergencies, ...	130
Expostulation, ...	14	First Sabbath in the New-Year, the (See NEW-YEAR), ...	332
the Psalmist reminds his enemies of the vanity of their opposition to himself, ...	14	Fitness of the true worshipper, the moral (See WORSHIPPER), ...	116
he exhorts them to repentance and piety, ...	14	Flock, the Divine Shepherd and His (See SHEPHERD), ...	111
Exposure and punishment of sin, the (See SIN), ...	101	Folly of trusting in riches, the, ...	266
Extremity and asylum of the saints, the	24	Foolish way of wealthy worldlings, the (See WAY), ...	241
Extremities of the saints, the (See SAINTS), ...	37	Forces, antagonistic (See ANTAGONISTIC), ...	9
FACT, privilege, and prospect, a great, ...	326	Forgiven, the blessedness of the (See BLESSEDNESS), ...	148
Faith in God, ...	59	Forlorn hopes (See HOPES), ...	45
personal, ...	59	Formal and the spiritual in divine service, the (See SERVICE), ...	247
absolute, ...	59	Forsaken, ...	105
habitual, ...	60	and suffering, ...	105
Faith, the exhortation of, ...	310	but not prayerless, ...	105
the trust prohibited, man, oppression, unlawfully acquired wealth, and lawfully acquired wealth, ...	310	but trusting in God, ...	105
the trust prescribed, its nature and ground, ...	311	Fount of blessing, the, ...	511
Faith, the trial and triumph of, ...	308	Friend, behaving as a, ...	108
the trial of the good man's faith arose from the assaults of his enemies. Notice: their design, method, and cowardice, ...	308	implies kind consideration, ...	108
the triumph of his faith is manifest,			

	PAGE		PAGE
generous sympathy, ...	169	the Fount of blessing, ...	511
self-denying service, ...	169	the power of, ...	312
constancy in love and devotion, ...	169	the Protector and Avenger of the oppressed, ...	36
Full conquest (See CONQUEST), ...	81	the Saviour of the meek (See MEEK), ...	425
GENERAL TRUTHS, the personal realisation of (See TRUTHS), ...	37	the Sovereignty of (See SOVEREIGNTY), ...	409
Gentleness, Divine, ...	83	the ways of (See WAYS), ...	437
the greatness of the good, ...	83	God's power and glory manifested in the sanctuary, ...	315
the gracious discipline through which this greatness is realised, in our sinful state, in our penitential state, in our accepted state, ...	84	God's shield (See SHIELD), ...	82
Gittith, ...	471	Godly in affliction, prayer the resource of the (See PRAYER), ...	142
Glorious conflict, the (See CONFLICT), ...	302	Godly, the character and privileges of the, ...	323
Glorious picture, a, ...	127	a description of character, righteousness of character and conduct, ...	323
Glorious prospect, a (See PROSPECT), ...	354	a declaration of privilege, joy, trust, triumph, ...	324
Glorious things spoken of the Church, ...	510	Godly in this world, the state of the (See STATE), ...	287
Glory of the Church, the, ...	349	Good, evil for (See EVIL), ...	166
consists in its being the dwelling-place of God, ...	349	the chief, ...	15
transcends the utmost glory of the world, ...	349	the grand question, ...	15
is seen in its security, ...	350	the true answer, the spirituality, sufficiency, and fruits of the supreme blessing, ...	15
in its sanctity, ...	350	the dispositions and benedictions of the (See DISPOSITIONS), ...	172
has been strikingly illustrated, ...	350	the fearlessness of the (See FEARLESSNESS), ...	129
Glory of the Church, an instructive illustration of the (See CHURCH), ...	237	man's access, trust, and testimony, the, ...	403
Glory of the Church, a striking illustration of the (See CHURCH), ...	235	man's present, past, and future, the, ...	402
Glory of the Church of God, the (See CHURCH), ...	506	the plottings of the wicked against the (See PLOTTINGS), ...	174
Glory manifested in the sanctuary, God's power and	315	the temporal prosperity of the wicked as contrasted with the peaceful destiny of the (See CONTRASTED), ...	178
God afflicting man, and man submitting to God, ...	191	Good things for good people, ...	78
God and His people (See PEOPLE), ...	161	God deals with us as we deal with Him, ...	78
God a refuge, ...	312	as we deal with one another, ...	79
God as a man of war (See WAR), ...	26	Goodness and mercy distinguished, ...	500
God, departing from, ...	402	Goodness of God an encouragement to seek Him, the (See SEEK), ...	499
drawing nigh to, ...	403	Goodness of God to His people, the good man's confidence of the (See CONFIDENCE), ...	391
faith in (See FAITH), ...	59	Goodness of the Lord, the, ...	146
glorified through man's wrath (See WRATH), ...	425	as a spectacle of surpassing beauty, ...	146
he that knows, will confess Him, ...	197	a treasury of inexhaustible wealth, ...	146
in nature, ...	411	a work of infinite beneficence, ...	146
the Creator, ...	411	Gospel of the stars, the (See CREATION), ...	28
Proprietor, ...	411	Gospel the power of God, the, ...	387
Sustainer of nature, ...	411	the insignificance of its commencement, ...	387
inspecting man (See INSPECTING), ...	267	its unlikelihood of success, ...	388
jealous for, ...	51	its glorious results, ...	388
His honour is bound up with the conduct of His people, ...	51	Government, aspects of the Divine, ...	417
leading His people (See LEADING), ...	437	a rebuke to wicked oppressors, ...	417
man appealing to (See APPEALING), ...	13	an encouragement to the righteous, ...	418
our helper, ...	273	an assurance of the punishment of the wicked, ...	418
our salvation (See SALVATION), ...	352	in its relation to the nations, the Divine, ...	35
realised by His people, ...	342	is characterised by equity, ...	35
the Divine Being, ...	342		
His relationship to us, ...	342		
the blessed assurance of this relationship, ...	343		
recollections of, painful to the wicked, ...	430		
seeking, ...	315		
the Champion of the good (See CHAMPION), ...	421		
the character of, a welcome revelation of (See CHARACTER), ...	170		

	PAGE		PAGE
vindicated with severity, ...	35	Hope in the saddest situation, ...	194
survives all opposition, ...	35	the situation the Psalmist was in, ...	194
comprehends all nations, and shall		the devout exercise of his mind, ...	194
bring them all into judgment, ...	35	the deliverance he obtained, ...	194
Government of the world, exhortation		Hope of the righteous in extreme suffer-	
to praise God because of His (See		ing, the (See SUFFERING), ...	365
PRAISE), ...	232	Hope opened to the world, ...	389
Grateful recollection, a (See RECOLLEC-		Hope, the grandeur and ground of the	
TION), ...	491	Psalmist's, ...	63
Great deposit, the, ...	143	Hopes, forlorn, ...	45
Guardian, the hunted life and its Divine		of the saint often appear forlorn, ...	45
(See LIFE), ...	295	have nevertheless strong foundations, ...	46
Guilty, not, ...	24	are destined to glorious realisation, ...	46
when we may plead, ...	24	House, love of God's, ...	128
may rely on a triumphant acquittal		House of God, the exile's longing for	
when we can justly do so, ...	25	the (See LONGING), ...	484
HATER, the causeless, ...	167	Human nature in the light of Chris-	
his character, ...	167	tianity (See CHRISTIANITY), ...	32
his righteous doom, ...	167	Human nature, the dignity of (See	
Heart, the confidence of a troubled, ...	306	NATURE), ...	31
confidence of safety and stability in		Human perfection (See PERFECTION), ...	302
God, ...	306	Hypocrites, God's challenge to religious,	
arising out of past experiences, ...	307	religious hypocrites proclaiming God's	
expressing itself in prayer, ...	307	law, ...	249
issuing in constant praise, ...	308	despising God's Word, ...	249
Heart, the cry of a troubled, ...	305	breaking God's laws, ...	249
a painful experience, ...	305	deceiving themselves as to the Divine	
a fervent prayer, ...	305	character and conduct, ...	250
a cheering recollection, ...	305	interrogated by God, ...	250
an exemplary resolution, ...	306	convicted of their sins, ...	250
Heart, the instincts of the, ...	133	warned by God, ...	250
the sense of dependence upon God, ...	133	IGNORED, Omniscience, ...	323
craving for fellowship with God, ...	133	Illustration of the glory of the Church,	
confidence in the eternal justice of		an instructive (See CHURCH), ...	237
God, ...	134	Illustration of the glory of the Church,	
gratitude for the goodness of God, ...	134	a striking (See CHURCH), ...	235
joy in the saving strength of God, ...	135	Illustrations of the Sovereignty of God	
trust in the ultimate triumph and		(See SOVEREIGNTY), ...	457
blessedness of God's people, ...	135	Immortality of atheism, the (See ATHE-	
Heaven, the peerage of (See PEER-		ISM), ...	52
AGE), ...	60	Imperfection of the righteous in ex-	
Help, a pathetic cry for, ...	108	treme suffering (See SUFFERING), ...	362
God is the unfailing source of help in		imprecations of the Psalmist, ...	363
time of trouble, ...	108	impress us with the imperfection of	
deliverance is implored from immi-		the best men, ...	364
nent peril, ...	108	the gradualness of the education of	
the cry for help is emboldened by the		mankind, ...	364
recollection of past deliverances, ...	108	the truth of the Sacred Scriptures, ...	364
Help of God, Israel's praise for the		Implored, the Divine favour (See	
promised (See HELP), ...	414	FAVOUR), ...	464
the afflictions of man and the, ...	463	Imprecatory Psalm, an, ...	162
special need, special, ...	65	views of A. A. Bonar, Canon Perowne,	
Helper, God our, ...	273	and Dr. D. Thomas on, ...	162
Hints for a missionary sermon, ...	414	Psalm, an, ...	362-364
History of human wickedness, the		views of Professors Alexander and	
(See WICKEDNESS), ...	293	Stuart and Dr. Moll on, ...	362-364
History of the Ancient Church, passages		Impressive beacon, an (See BEACON), ...	263
from the, with their lessons to the		Indispensable prayer for every one, an	
Modern Church (See CHURCH), ...	468	(See PRAYER), ...	255
History, scenes from a remarkable		Infirmities, spiritual, ...	435
(See SCENES), ...	443	their nature, ...	435
Hold of sin, the, ...	200	their reasons, ...	436
sin takes hold of man by its power, ...	200	Inheritance of the saints, the, ...	62
by an accusing conscience, ...	200	is Divine, ...	62
by its evil consequences, ...	200	secure, ...	62
Holy war, the (See WAR), ...	6	joyful, ...	62
Homily, a May, ...	331	permanent, ...	63

	PAGE		PAGE
Inheritance, the choice of our (See CHOICE), ...	234	the persons to be judged, ...	246
Inspecting man, God, ...	267	the witnesses of the judgment, ...	247
God's profound interest in humanity, ...	267	the righteousness of the judgment, ...	247
His searching scrutiny of humanity, ...	268	Judgment, human sin and Divine (See SIN), ...	446
the supreme concern of humanity, ...	268	Judgment of God upon the wicked, the effect upon the righteous of the (See EFFECT), ...	264
Instincts of the heart, the (See HEART), ...	133	Judgments, the instruments and methods of the Divine, and the objects for which they are inflicted, ...	453
Instruments and methods of the Divine judgments (See JUDGMENTS), ...	453	Justice in the court of Heaven, the upright man pleading for (See PLEADING), ...	124
Intruders in sacred places, profane, ...	462		
in Christian churches, Ritualism, Rationalism, selfish religionism, ...	462	KING, the joy of the Heavenly (See JOY), ...	99
in human spirits, carnality, worldliness, hatred, &c.	462	King, the triumphal entry of the glorious, ...	117
Israel, the Shepherd of (See SHEPHERD), ...	466	will be into a palace of enduring splendour, ...	117
		in the character of a mighty conqueror, ...	118
JEALOUS for God (See GOD), ...	51	attended by a brilliant throng of celestial hosts, ...	118
Jehovah, confidence in, the pledge of victory (See CONFIDENCE), ...	97	the occasion of inexpressible joy to the universe, ...	118
Jehovah, the name of, ...	94	Kings, a prayer for, ...	381
a consolation in trouble, ...	94	the character, function, and need of a true king, ...	381
an inspiring battle-cry, ...	95	the duty of subjects, ...	382
the strength of the Militant Church, ...	95	Knowledge of God a comfort to His people, the, ...	286
Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, ...	232, 235-238	Knows God, he that, will confess Him, ...	197
Jerusalem, ...	506	Korah, the sons of, ...	205
Jonath-Elem-Rechokim, ...	281		
Joy in the Lord Christ, ...	152	LAW and testimony of God, man's relation to the (See RELATION), ...	438
because of the beauty of His character, ...	152	Law of the lip, the (See LIP), ...	58
the splendour of His achievements, ...	153	Law, the absolute perfection of the, ...	91
the blessedness of His reign	153	its incomparable excellence as considered in itself, ...	91
Joy of the heavenly King, the, ...	99	in its relation to those who keep it, intellectually, emotionally, and practically, it is supremely excellent, ...	91
arose from a consciousness of newly achieved victory, ...	99	Law, the joy-giving power of the, ...	90
was accelerated by possessing an affluence of Divine blessing, ...	99	in a complete moral life there are three stages in relation to the law of God, ...	90
was intensified by the assurance of the permanency of His government, ...	100	rebellion against it, ...	90
Joy, the Messiah's reign, and (See MESSIAH), ...	223	submission to it, ...	90
Joys of salvation, the, ...	259	joy in it, ...	90
the joy of a sufficient and final answer to the self-upbraidings of a guilty soul, ...	259	Law, the light-giving power of the, ...	89
of a portion which satisfies the heart's largest conceptions and desires, ...	260	the infallibility of the law, ...	89
of an answer to all the difficulties and perplexities which beset the spirit and the intellect in their progress, ...	260	the subjects of its illumination, ...	89
of having the key to all the mysterious ways of Providence in the world, ...	260	Law, the purifying power of the, ...	90
of victory over death, ...	260	how the law makes us pure, ...	90
of living union with God, with Christ, with all living and blessed beings, eternally, ...	260	how this purity is the source of strength, joy, and vision, ...	91
Journey, the life of man upon earth a, ...	480	Law, the soul-restoring power of the, ...	88
Judah, the wilderness of, ...	313	the attribute of the law, "perfect,"	88
Judgment, a scene of, ...	245	the effect of the law, "converting the soul,"	89
the Judge, ...	245	Leading His people, God, ...	437
the principles upon which judgment will be administered, ...	245	the Leader of the good	437
the certainty of the judgment, ...	246	the instruments by which they are led, ...	438
the terrible majesty of the Judge at His appearing, ...	249	the manner in which they are led, ...	438

	PAGE		PAGE
Lehazkir, ...	366	Little of the righteous better than the	
Life, a glimpse of a triumphant, . . .	271	much of the wicked, the, . . .	175
the nature of the triumphant life, it		because it is honestly gained, . . .	175
is characterised by faith in God,		may be safely retained, . . .	175
and worship of God, ...	271	may be truly enjoyed, . . .	176
the conquering power of the trium-		will be carefully spent, . . .	176
phant life, ...	272	benevolently used, . . .	176
Life, a glimpse of a troubled, . . .	270	divinely blessed, . . .	176
the cause of, and the comfort in the		Loneliness of suffering, the (See SUFFERING), . . .	106
trouble, ...	270	Longing for the house of God, the	
Life, crises in the spiritual, . . .	394	exile's, ...	484
are sometimes occasioned by the		arose from his love for the house of	
Providence of God, ...	394	God, ...	484
are painful to the soul, ...	394	was a longing for conscious fellowship	
are surmounted in communion with		with God, ...	484
God, ...	394	was the longing of his entire being, . . .	485
Life, links in the chain of (See LINKS),	141	a longing of great intensity, . . .	485
Life of confidence in God, a, . . .	289	led him to extol the blessedness of	
Life of man, the loving-kindness of		those who were constantly engaged	
God better than the (See LOVING-		in God's house, ...	485
KINDNESS), ...	316	Longings, devout, ...	210
Life of man upon earth a journey, the,	480	for vindication and deliverance, . . .	210
Life of ungodly men a dream, the		for restoration to the tabernacle of	
(See DREAM).	399	God, ...	211
Life, the blessed, ...	1	Lord, a song to the (See SONG), . . .	140
its secret, a right relation of the will,		Lord Christ, joy in the (See Joy), . . .	152
the affections, and the intelligence		Lord, the Church and her (See CHURCH),	225
to the law of God, ...	2	Lord, the goodness of the (See GOOD-	
its security, manifestation, perpetuity,		NESS), ...	146
universality, ...	2	Lot of the wicked, the barren, . . .	346
Life, the chequered, ...	51	seen in relation to the ordinary events	
the vicissitudes of the outer life, of		of this life, ...	346
the inner life, ...	51	the great needs of the soul, . . .	346
the aim of this discipline, ...	51	the great future, ...	347
Life, the distinguishing characteristics		Love of God's house, ...	128
of a wicked (See WICKED), . . .	169	Love, true, ...	70
Life, the hunted, and its Divine		the right object, ...	70
guardian, ...	295	measure, ...	71
the character and conduct of the		and inspiration of, ...	71
persecutors, ...	295	Lovingkindness of God better than the	
the prayer and confidence of the per-		life of man, the, ...	316
secuted, ...	296	life is good, ...	316
Life, the light of, ...	80	the lovingkindness of God is better	
the Psalmist recognises God as the		than life even at its best, . . .	317
source of his light, ...	80	MAGISTRACY, aspects of, ...	477
joy, ...	81	magistrates and judges are set before	
glory, ...	81	us as occupying a distinguished	
Life, the Psalm of, ...	55	position, ...	477
the question which the Psalmist pro-		observed by God, ...	477
poses, ...	55	called to the highest duties, . . .	478
the comprehensive answer which is		exhibiting the worst perversity, . . .	478
given, ...	56	tending to a great change, . . .	478
Life upon earth, man's, ...	452	leading man to cry for the inaugura-	
the weakness, unsubstantiality, im-		tion of the direct magistracy of	
permanence, irretrievableness, and		God, ...	479
grand distinction of human life, . . .	452	Mahabath, ...	207
Light-giving power of the law, the (See		Majorities, minorities and, ...	10
LAW), ...	89	the majority without God, its great-	
Light of life, the (See LIFE), . . .	80	ness and bitterness, ...	10
Links in the chain of life, ...	141	the minority with God, his conscious-	
prosperity and presumption, . . .	141	ness of safety, refuge in prayer,	
presumption and chastisement, . . .	141	sublime peacefulness, assurance of	
chastisement and prayer, ...	141	victory, and generous temper, . . .	10
prayer and deliverance, ...	142	Man and his enemies, the godly (See	
deliverance and praise, ...	142	ENEMIES), ...	282
Lip, the law of the, ...	58	Man appealing to God (See APPEALING),	13
the nature of, the evil of, and the			
cure for slander, ...	58		

	PAGE		PAGE
Man a walking shadow (See SHADOW),	188	Mercy, the exercise of the Divine,	451
Man in the thunderstorm, the true attitude of (See THUNDERSTORM),	136	in holding back deserved punishment,	451
Man pleading for justice in the court of Heaven, the upright (See PLEADING),	124	in forgiving great iniquities,	451
Man's life upon earth (See LIFE),	452	in compassionating human frailties,	452
Man speaking to his soul (See SPEAKING),	208	Messiah as a majestic conqueror, the,	222
Man submitting, God afflicting and	191	the enterprise which He has undertaken,	222
Man, the Divine way for (See WAY),	505	the manner in which He goes forth to this enterprise,	222
Man, the experience of a godly,	339	the reasons for which He goes forth to this enterprise,	223
the godly man is anxious to impart his experience to others,	339	the success which He achieves in this enterprise,	223
his experience includes both penitence and praise,	339	Messiah-King, the praise of the,	220
his logic,	340	the reasons why He is praised,	220
his experience always culminates in a song of praise,	340	the manner in which He is praised,	221
Man, the solicitude of God for the well-being of (See SOLICITUDE),	473	the excellence of this praise,	221
Man under Divine chastisement (See CHASTISEMENT),	450	Messiah's reign and joy, the	223
Manifestations of Divine power,	328	His reign, its righteousness and perpetuity,	223
their sphere, in nature, in human society,	328	His joy,	224
their significance,	329	Messiah, the glorious reign of the (See REIGN),	383
their influence, they inspire awe, confidence, and joy,	329	Michtam,	281
March of the good, the victorious,	343	Minorities and majorities (See MAJORITIES),	10
is opposed by enemies,	344	Missionary prayer of the Church, the (See PRAYER),	340
marked by trials,	344	Missionary sermon, hints for a,	414
led on victoriously,	344	Mistake of some men, a great necessity of all men, and a great,	396
led on to a glorious termination,	345	Mistaken verdicts,	11
May Homily, a,	331	the verdict of sense, popular, plausible, confident,	11
Meditation and praise,	299	the judgment of faith,	12
the subject and influence of the Psalmist's meditation,	299	Model of devout praise, a (See PRAISE),	419
Meek, God the Saviour of the,	425	Model prayer, a (See PRAYER),	462
the character, peril, and Deliverer of the people of God,	425	Moral courage (See COURAGE),	44
Memory,	433, 436	Moral cowardice and its causes (See COWARDICE),	442
Men of the world,	68	Morality, evangelical,	57
their portion,	68	its comprehensiveness,	57
their prosperity,	68	loftiness,	57
the disadvantages of their lot, the hand of God is against them, they have a profound discontent, they soon part with their inheritance for ever,	68	inspiration,	58
Men of the world who have their portion in this life,	243	recompense,	58
must resign it at death,	243	Morality of prayer, the (See PRAYER),	84
when they depart hence are gathered to their moral ancestors,	244	Morning prayer (See PRAYER),	17
degrade their being,	244	Motive to prayer, the Providence of God a,	290
Men, the destinies of,	5	Mulishness,	151
are various,	5	thwarts the Divine plan,	151
are decided by their moral character and conduct,	5	debases the powers of the soul,	151
are as widely contrasted as their character,	5	imperils the highest interests of being,	151
Mercies of God an encouragement to seek Him, the former (See SEEK),	503	NAME OF JEHOVAH, the (See JEHOVAH)	94
Mercy, goodness and, distinguished,	500	Nations, the Divine government in its relation to the (See GOVERNMENT),	35
Mercy justly distributed, sorrow and (See SORROW),	152	Nature and the supernatural,	74
		nature as obedient to supernatural power,	74
		the executant of a supernatural will,	74
		ministering to supernatural purpose,	75
		Nature, God in (See GOD),	411
		Nature God's temple (See TEMPLE),	138
		Nature in the light of Christianity, human (See CHRISTIANITY),	32
		Nature of sin, the self-punishing,	27

	PAGE		PAGE
all sin is the digging of a pit, . . .	27	bond of unity, . . .	61
all sin sinks into the pit which it digs, . . .	28	uncompromising loyalty, . . .	61
Nature, the dignity of human, . . .	31	grand inheritance, . . .	62
the apparent weakness, . . .	31	Penitent's Psalm, the, . . .	253
the essential greatness, . . .	31	the penitent's confession, recognises the evil of sin, recognises the sin as his own, regards sin as hostile to God, . . .	253
the source of the greatness of human nature, . . .	32	the penitent's prayer, for forgiveness of his sins, for cleansing and re- newal of his spirit, for restoration of the joy of salvation, for preser- vation from sin and ruin, . . .	254
Natural theology (See THEOLOGY), . .	86	the penitent's resolution, to seek the conversion of sinners, to worship God, . . .	255
Nearness to His people, God's, a reason for praising Him, . . .	416	People, God and His, . . .	161
there are times when God specially manifests Himself to His people, . .	416	God's people are the objects of His fatherly regard, . . .	161
these manifestations should awaken the praise of His people, . . .	417	the subjects of His holy discipline, . .	161
Necessity of all men, a great, and a great mistake of some men, . . .	396	the recipients of His redeeming grace, .	162
Need and God's thought, man's, . . .	200	People, good things for good (See GOOD), . . .	78
an acknowledgment of human need, .	200	Perdition, dreadful, . . .	128
an expression of confidence in God, .	201	the good man is chiefly concerned about his soul, . . .	128
Need, prayer for a time of (See PRAYER)	132	knows that the destiny of the soul is settled at death, . . .	128
special help, special, . . .	65	reeils with horror from being asso- ciated in destiny with the wicked, . .	128
Neginah, . . .	304	Perfection, human, . . .	302
Neginoth, . . .	270	its nature, salvation from troubles, victory over enemies, possession of promised privileges, . . .	303
New Year, the first Sabbath in the mark that goodness which has crowned the year, as to our country, . . .	332	its attainment, promised by God, pro- moted by prayer, guaranteed by past triumphs and present posses- sions, demanding strenuous effort, ascribed to God, . . .	303
our families, . . .	332	Perfection of the law, the absolute (See LAW), . . .	91
our personal experience, . . .	333	Peril and prayer of the Church, the (See CHURCH), . . .	481
the universal Church, . . .	333	Peril, a safe refuge in sore (See RE- FUGE), . . .	287
Night of repentance, the, . . .	22	Perplexity, soul, . . .	39
its darkness, . . .	22	the problem, "Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?" . . .	39
duration, . . .	22	the solution, has regard to our per- sonal discipline, the salvation of the wicked, the glory of God, . . .	40
spectres, . . .	23	Persecution, prayer in (See PRAYER), .	367
stars, . . .	23	Personal realisation of general truths, the, . . .	37
sunrise, . . .	23	the Psalmist recognises his personal fault and need, . . .	37
Not guilty (See GUILTY), . . .	24	appeals to God as his personal Helper, vows his personal consecration, . .	37
Obedience and sacrifice, . . .	195	Picture, a glorious, . . .	127
Object, season, and hope of prayer, the (See PRAYER), . . .	361	the subject, . . .	127
Offering to his Lord, the servant's (See SERVANT), . . .	195	the position, . . .	127
Old age, the comparative blessedness of the Christian's (See BLESSEDNESS), .	379	the effect upon the beholders, . . .	127
Old man's retrospect, an (See RETRO- SPECT), . . .	379	Piety, decided, . . .	292
Omega, Alpha and, . . .	28	its properties and advantages, . . .	292
Omniscience ignored, . . .	323	Piety, three aspects of, . . .	156
Oppressed, God the Protector and Avenger of the, . . .	36	piety waiting on the Lord, . . .	156
Overthrow of the enemies of Christ, the utter (See ENEMIES), . . .	103	rejoicing in God, . . .	157
Painful experience, a (See EXPERI- ENCE), . . .	215	praying to God, . . .	157
Paths, safe steps on dangerous, . . .	64		
our need of the Divine succour, be- cause of steep paths, rough paths, dark paths, slippery paths, . . .	64		
the sufficiency of the Divine succour, .	65		
Patience with man, man's provocation of God and God's (See PROVOCATION), .	449		
Peace by power, . . .	386		
Peerage of heaven, the, . . .	60		
their patent of nobility, . . .	60		
oath of fealty, . . .	61		

	PAGE		PAGE
Pilgrimage of the wicked, the	480	Praise, exemplary,	291
is characterised by privation,	480	in its theme,	291
fully,	480	in the spirit of its offerer,	291
peril,	480	in its enthusiasm,	291
criminality,	480	in its sphere,	291
ruinousness,	480	in the sense of its imperfection,	292
Plain, the hidden ways of God made		Praise for the promised help of God,	
(See WAYS),	121	Israel's,	414
Pleading for justice in the court of		heroic anticipation of victory,	414
heaven, the upright man,	124	firm ground of confidence,	415
David's appeal was made to the right		devout utterance of praise,	416
judge,	124	Praise God, exhortation to, because of	
presented in a proper spirit,	125	His government of the world,	232
supported by ample evidence,	126	reasons why we should praise God,	
enforced by strong and impassioned		because of His majesty and power,	
arguments,	127	the universality of His rule, under	
concludes with the expression of un-		His government, the interests of His	
doubting assurance,	127	loyal subjects are specially secured,	
Plottings of the wicked against the		the holiness of His government,	
good, the,	174	the success of His government,	232
are wrathful,	174	directions how we should praise Him,	
cruel,	174	enthusiastically, intelligently,	233
determined,	175	Praise, meditation and,	299
cowardly,	175	Praise of the Messiah-King, the (See	
self-destructive,	175	MESSIAH),	220
Portion in this life, men of the world		Praising God for His great kindness in	
who have their (See MEN),	243	affliction,	335
Position, the present, and future pros-		a great affliction, variously repre-	
pects of the wicked as seen by the		sented, permitted by God,	335
spiritually enlightened man,	398	great kindness in great affliction, in	
their present position is perilous,	398	preserving the afflicted, in the de-	
their future prospects are terrible, de-		sign and issue of the affliction,	336
struction complete, sudden, effected		praise for great kindness in great	
by God, making manifest the un-		affliction,	337
reality of their former prosperity,	398	Praising God for His mighty works,	334
Power and glory manifested in the sanc-		the reason of this praise, the nature,	
tuary, God's,	315	constancy, and influence of His	
Power, manifestations of Divine (See		works, and the necessity of observ-	
MANIFESTATIONS),	328	ing them,	334
Power of God, the,	312	the enthusiasm of this praise, it is	
men do not generally believe in,	312	offered heartily, joyfully, openly,	335
helps to faith in God's power,	313	the universality of this praise,	335
Power of God, the Gospel the (See		Praising Him, God's nearness to His	
GOSPEL),	387	people a reason for (See NEAR-	
Power of the law, the joy-giving (See		NESS),	416
LAW),	90	Prayer, a model,	462
Power of the law, the light-giving (See		the Person addressed,	462
LAW),	89	the prayer offered,	463
Power of the law, the purifying (See		the plea urged,	463
LAW),	90	Prayer a preparation for conflict,	95
Power of the law, the soul-restoring		prayer should have reference to future	
(See LAW),	88	emergencies,	95
Power, peace by,	386	invokes the invincible protection of	
Practical atheism (See ATHEISM),	40	Jehovah,	96
Praise,	33	should be accompanied with sacrifice,	96
the minstrel,	33	is urgent to secure a specific answer	
the harp,	34	to its petitions,	96
the song, its theme, joyfulness,		is found wherever the presence of	
object, and occasion,	34	Jehovah is manifested,	97
Praise, a model of devout,	419	Prayer, an earnest appeal and,	217
the praise resolved upon loses sight		in the appeal they assert that they	
of self in devout admiration of the		have neither broken God's cove-	
character and doings of God,	419	nant, nor lapsed into idolatry, nor	
evinces its reality by resolving to		backslidden from God, they appeal	
imitate Him,	420	to His omniscience in proof of this,	
Praise, a song of,	157	they also assert that they were	
for what God is in Himself,	157	suffering severely because of their	
for what He does for His people,	158	attachment to Him,	217

	PAGE		PAGE
in the prayer we have, believing ex-		the means by which the attainment	
postulations, urgent entreaties, and		of this object is sought, ...	341
effective pleas, ...	218	the confidence in which this prayer	
Prayer, and encouragement, complaint		is offered, ...	341
(See COMPLAINT), ...	300	Prayer, the exile's, ...	488
Prayer and prediction of the good man		the address which is presented, ...	488
concerning his wicked enemies, the,	321	the object which is sought, ...	488
prayer for preservation from wicked		the pleas which are urged, ...	488
enemies, the description of the		the sublime conclusion of the whole, ...	489
enemies, the prayer of the Psalmist,	321	Prayer, the morality of, ...	84
prediction of the destruction of wicked		prayer must be offered in a right	
enemies, the author, instruments,		cause, ...	84
manner and effect of their destruc-		in a right spirit, ...	85
tion, ...	322	at a right time, ...	85
Prayer and vow, David's, ...	258	Prayer, the object, season, and hope of, ...	361
Prayer, David's, ...	258, 261	the object must be infinite in intelli-	
Prayer for a time of need, ...	132	gence, approachable, entreatable, ...	361
characterised by deep humility and		the season, when we suffer wrong-	
earnestness, ...	132	fully, when our need is great and	
Christ-like trust in God's word, ...	132	greatly felt, when our desire for	
grateful recognition of God's favour,	132	spiritual blessings is intense, while	
steadfast reliance upon God's faith-		the overtures of divine grace are	
fulness amidst the failure of earthly		made to us, ...	361
comforts, ...	132	the great encouragements, the abound-	
practical submission to God's will as		ing mercy and saving truth of God, ...	362
the truest safety, ...	133	Prayer, the providence of God a motive	
encouraging self-admonition to hope		to, ...	290
in God for ever, ...	133	Prayer the resource of the godly in	
Prayer for every one, an indispensable,	255	affliction, ...	142
"Cleanse me from my sin,"	255	springs from trust in God, as the	
the need you have to offer this prayer,	255	Almighty Father, the everlasting	
the requisites you must possess to		refuge, ...	142
present it successfully, ...	256	implores the highest blessings, ...	143
Prayer for kings, a (See KINGS), ...	381	characterised by the noblest emo-	
Prayer in persecution, ...	367	tions, ...	143
the circumstances and condition of		followed by the grandest deliverance, ...	143
the suppliant, persecution, afflict-		Prayer, the return of (See RETURN), ...	168
tion, need, ...	367	Prayer to his Lord, the servant's (See	
the prayer of the suppliant, the Being		SERVANT), ...	198
to whom it is addressed, the objects		Prayer, trust and (See TRUST), ...	370
which it seeks to attain, the ur-		Prayer, urgency in (See URGENCY), ...	368
gency with which it is presented, ...	367	Preacher of wisdom, the, ...	239
Prayer in trouble, ...	429	addresses himself to all peoples, ...	239
something common to all men, ...	429	to all classes, ...	239
a commendable example for all men, ...	429	duly considers his subject, ...	240
a Divine Auditor of all men, ...	429	deals with difficult questions, ...	240
a great mistake of some men, ...	429	deals with them poetically, musically, ...	240
an experience which may happen to		Precept and promise, ...	281
all men, ...	430	the duty enjoined, ...	281
Prayer, invariable topics for, ...	119	the promise with which it is enforced, ...	281
prayer should be addressed to Je-		Prediction of the good man concerning	
hovah, ...	119	his wicked enemies, the prayer and	
should be offered that our enemies		(See PRAYER), ...	321
may have no ground to taunt us		Presence, the withdrawal of the Divine, ...	454
with the failure of our trust in God, ...	119	is invariably preceded by many and	
should be offered for Divine guid-		aggravated sins, ...	455
ance, ...	120	is invariably succeeded by many and	
for Divine mercy, ...	120	terrible calamities, ...	456
Prayer, morning, ...	17	Present, past, and future, the good	
true prayer is personal, ...	17	man's, ...	402
profound and passionate, ...	17	Presumptuous sins (See SINS), ...	93
resolute, ...	18	Privilege, and prospect, a great fact, ...	326
obedient, ...	18	Privileges of the godly, the character	
expectant, ...	18	and (See GODLY), ...	323
Prayer of the Church, the missionary, ...	340	Profane intruders in sacred places (See	
the great object of this prayer, that		INTRUDERS), ...	462
God may be known and worshipped		Profundis, de (See DE), ...	73
by all men, ...	340	Programme of evil, the (See EVIL), ...	3

	PAGE
Progress, religious, ...	486
represented as deriving its support from God, ...	486
advancing in conformity with His law, ...	486
making unfavourable circumstances conduce to its own ends, ...	487
steadily advancing, ...	487
gloriously terminating, ...	487
Promise, precept and (See PRECEPT), ...	281
Proprietorship of the world, the Divine (See WORLD), ...	114
Prospect, a glorious, ...	354
of a time when the Divine triumphs will be extensively witnessed, ...	354
joyously celebrated by His people, ...	355
when heathen nations shall submit themselves unto Him, ...	356
when He shall be universally praised, ...	356
Prospect, a great fact, privilege, and, ...	326
Prosperity of the wicked, the temporal, ...	392
is sometimes clearly manifest, ...	392
sometimes continued even to the very end of life, ...	392
has an injurious effect upon their character, ...	392
is a great trial to the people of God, ...	393
Prosperity of the wicked unworthy the envy of the good, the transient, ...	171
there is apparently much in the prosperity of the wicked to excite the fretful envy of the good, ...	171
it is foolish to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it is only of temporary duration, ...	172
it is sinful, because it is contrary to the command of God, ...	172
it is injurious, because it awakens the lower sentiments of the soul, ...	172
it is presumptuous, because it is rebellion against the providence of God, ...	172
Prosperity of Zion sought, the, ...	262
the importance of the object sought, the grounds of encouragement in seeking it, ...	262
the manner in which we should seek it, ...	262
Providence of God a motive to prayer, the, ...	290
Provocation of God, and God's patience with man, man's, ...	449
man's provocation of God, by persistence in evil, and spurious repentance, ...	449
God's patience with man, manifested in His judgments upon Israel, His mercies to them, and His remembrance of them, ...	449
Psalm, an imprecatory (See IMPRECATORY), ...	162, 362
Psalm of life, the (See LIFE), ...	55
Psalm, the Penitent's (See PENITENT), ...	253
Public worship more acceptable to God than private devotion, ...	508
adduce some facts in the Divine administration indicative of God's higher estimate of public worship, ...	508

	PAGE
state some reasons why, in the nature of the case, God should prefer public to private worship, ...	509
Punishment of sin, the exposure and (See SIN), ...	101
REALISED by His people, God (See GOD), ...	342
Reasonableness of worship, the (See WORSHIP), ...	154
Reasons, ultimate, ...	77
why God delivers and honours men? "Because He delighted in me"	77
practical lessons suggested by this truth, ...	78
Recollection, a grateful, ...	491
of national deliverance, ...	491
of the removal of the Divine anger, ...	491
of the bestowal of forgiveness, ...	491
Recollection, reflection, and declaration, ...	436
recollection, memory regarded as a source of pain, a source of pleasure, and an aid to faith, ...	436
reflection, "I will meditate,"	437
declaration, would be intelligent, and trust-inspiring, ...	437
Recollections of God painful to the wicked, ...	430
what we mean by remembering God, why the recollection of such a Being should ever be painful, ...	430
Recollections, the precious, present trials, and glorious resource of an aged saint, ...	371
recollections, of a life of trust in God, of a life sustained by God, ...	371
trials, arose from his enemies, he sets before us their character, aim, and method, ...	371
resource, confidence in and prayer to God, ...	372
Recovery from sickness, thoughts on (See SICKNESS), ...	139
Redemption, ...	243
the subject of, "the soul,"	243
the price of, "the precious blood of Christ,"	243
the period of, in time only, ...	243
Refuge, God a, ...	312
Refuge in sore peril, a safe, ...	287
the extreme perils in a good man's life, arose from the bitter reproaches, the fierce cruelty, and the subtle schemes of his enemies, ...	287
the secure refuge from the perils of a good man's life, notice, the ground, the expression, and the greatness of his trust in God, ...	288
Refuge, the saint's, ...	130
earnestly sought, ...	130
graciously enjoyed, ...	131
exultingly acknowledged, ...	131
Regeneration, ...	510
its importance, ...	510
its season, ...	511
its reality, ...	511
its Agent, ...	511

	PAGE		PAGE
its means, ...	511	Religious progress (See PROGRESS), ...	486
its counterfeits, ...	511	Religious worship (See WORSHIP), ...	227, 471
its evidences, ...	511	Repentance, the night of (See NIGHT), ...	22
Reign and joy, the Messiah's (See MESSIAH), ...	223	Resolution, a commendable, ...	184
Reign of Christ, the (See CHRIST), ...	8	a great danger of sinful speech, ...	184
Reign of God, the diverse destinies of men manifesting the (See DESTINIES), ...	297	a wise precaution, to guard against this danger, ...	185
the blessings of His reign, the administration of justice, the enjoyment of peace, the progress of religion, beneficent government, abundant prosperity, ...	383	Resource and comfort in trouble (See TROUBLE), ...	249
the universality of His reign, over all classes and in all places, ...	384	Results (See DESTINIES), ...	5
the perpetuity of His reign, guaranteed by the declaration of God's Word, and the character of His sovereignty, ...	385	Retribution, ...	38
the praise of His reign, expressed by rendering to Him homage, service, tribute, and blessing, ...	385	the pit of human misery and ruin is digged by man, not by God, ...	38
Rejoicing exile, the, ...	284	sin may be cleverly devised and executed, but its frustration is certain, ...	39
he rejoices in the minuteness of the Divine knowledge and the tenderness of the Divine regard, ...	284	sin may long remain unpunished, but its punishment is certain, ...	39
in His assurance of deliverance from his enemies, notice, the condition, promptitude, and assurance of deliverance, ...	285	the final punishment of sin is overwhelming, ...	39
in his triumphant confidence in God, ...	285	Retrospect, an old man's	379
in his delightful obligations to God, notice the nature and reason of these, ...	285	the Psalmist's scholarship, ...	379
Relation of God to the saints, the (See SAINTS), ...	19	occupation, ...	379
Relation of God to the wicked, the (See WICKED), ...	18	prayer, ...	379
Relation to our ancestors and successors, our, ...	441	wish, ...	379
our great obligations to our ancestors, ...	441	Return of prayer, the, ...	168
our great duty to our successors, ...	441	prayer may return unheard, ...	168
Relation to the law and testimony of God, man's, ...	438	unanswered, ...	168
man has received a knowledge of the will and works of God, ...	439	bringing benedictions, ...	168
should impart a knowledge of the will and works of God to others, ...	439	Revelation of the character of God, a welcome (See CHARACTER), ...	170
should do this with a noble aim, that the knowledge might be continued to the race, that the coming generations might avoid the errors and sins of their ancestors, might be righteous and religious, ...	440	Revelation, the characteristics of a Divine, ...	48
Religion, the revival of, ...	494	the grand characteristic, purity, ...	48
Religion, three views of, ...	159	the Scriptures which profess to be the words of the Lord have been tested, and their divinity established; tested by criticism, science, and experience, ...	48
what it is, personal faith in God, devotedness to God, communion with God, ...	159	the consequent preciousness of the Sacred Scriptures, ...	49
what it does, establishes right relations between the soul and God, effects a moral transformation of character, ensures the highest blessedness of being, ...	159	Revival of religion, the, ...	494
what it deserves, earnest study, personal trial, hearty commendation, ...	159	Riches, the folly of trusting in, ...	266
		Righteous and his little better than the wicked with his much, the (See LITTLE), ...	175
		Righteous, the, ...	177
		the land he inherits, ...	177
		the wisdom he speaks, ...	177
		the law he keeps, ...	177
		the safety he enjoys, ...	177
		the condemnation he escapes, ...	178
		the exaltation he expects, ...	178
		Rock, the sheltering, ...	306
		Royal banquet, a (See BANQUET), ...	113
		SABBATH-SCHOOL anniversary, for a, ...	441
		Sacrifices, material and spiritual, ...	247
		Sad scenes and painful experiences, ...	276
		sore evils in the city, the evils were manifold in form, universal in extent, continuous in their activities, and painful in their results, ...	276
		base treachery in friendship, friendship enjoyed, violated, injured and complaining, ...	276
		earnest prayer in suffering, ...	277

	PAGE		PAGE
Saint, an aged, the precious recollec- tions, present trials, and glorious resource of (See RECOLLECTIONS),	371	an earnest prayer for deliverance from present dangers, ...	504
Saint and his God, the aged, ...	373	a devout resolution to serve God, by obedience and worship, ...	504
Saint's refuge, the (See REFUGE), ...	130	Seek Him, the goodness of God an en- couragement to, ...	499
Saints, the extremity and asylum of the, ...	24	the petitions of the suppliant, for audience, protection, mercy, joy, ...	499
Saints, the extremities of the, ...	37	the pleas of, his necessity, consecra- tion, confidence, importunity, ...	499
the depth of their distress, ...	37	the encouragement of, the goodness and mercy of God, ...	500
the fulness of their deliverance, ...	37	Seek Him, the supremacy of God an encouragement to, ...	500
the expression of their gratitude, ...	38	the supremacy of God, in Himself, and in His doings, ...	501
Saints, the inheritance of the (See INHERITANCE), ...	62	the effects of that supremacy, all nations shall worship Him, the troubled soul shall trust Him, ...	501
Saints, the relation of God to the, ...	19	Seeking God, ...	315
He is their Shepherd, ...	19	how, where, when, and why we should seek God, ...	315
shield, ...	19	Sennacherib, King of Assyria, 228-231, 421-424	
song, ...	19	Sermon, an Adullam, ...	160
Saint, the triumphant faith of an aged (See FAITH), ...	376	the congregation, ...	160
Salvation, Divine, ...	71	the preacher, ...	160
the Psalmist's confession, ...	71	the sermon, ...	160
his resolution, ...	72	Servant, the Lord's doing for His, a sad situation, darkness, distress, helplessness, ...	192
Salvation, God our, ...	352	a great salvation, was granted in answer to prayer, complete, joy- inspiring, influential, ...	192
in relation to life's burdens, ...	352	a hearty celebration, ...	193
to life's perils, ...	352	Servant's offering to his Lord, the obedience to God, he will not offer sacrifices instead of obedience, he will render the obedience which God requires, he will render it heartily, God had disposed him to do so, ...	195
to death, ...	353	publication of the perfections of God, what he announces, where he makes the announcement, ...	196
Salvation, I am thy, ...	164	Servant's prayer to his Lord, the, the most assured confidence in God is not regarded by His servant as a substitute for prayer, ...	198
salvation is from God, ...	164	a true servant of God may fall into many sins, ...	198
implies death to evil and life to good, demands everlasting gratitude and praise, ...	165	if he do so, the penalty of his sin will surely come upon him, ...	199
Salvation in God's smile, ...	467	a servant of God suffering the penalty of his sin may seek deliverance from God, ...	199
salvation consists in the life and growth of the soul under the favour of God, ...	467	in his prayer the servant of God has reference not to himself alone, but to others also, ...	199
Salvation of the Church, and the de- struction of her enemies, the (See DESTRUCTION), ...	269	the servant of God in his deepest dis- tress confides in the Lord God, ...	200
Salvation, the great, ...	76	Service, the formal and the spiritual in Divine, ...	247
a great danger, ...	77	the worthlessness of merely formal and material sacrifices in the Divine service, because of the infinite re- sources, and the spirituality of God, ...	247
a Divine deliverer, ...	77		
a complete redemption, ...	77		
Salvation, the joys of (See JOYS), ...	259		
Sanctified trial (See TRIAL), ...	66		
Satisfaction of the godly soul, the, ...	317		
is found in the provisions of God, which are spiritual, rich, abundant, in meditation on God: notice, the nature, subject, and season of this exercise, ...	317		
in the protection of God, ...	318		
in the sustentation of God, ...	318		
in the celebration of the praise of God, ...	318		
Satisfaction, ...	69		
the nature of true, it is spiritual, com- plete, full, everlasting, ...	69		
the source of true, the vision of God, the likeness of God, ...	69		
Scene of judgment, a (See JUDGMENT), ...	245		
Scenes from a remarkable history, ...	443		
a people divinely emancipated, ...	443		
divinely led, ...	444		
divinely provisioned, ...	444		
basely perverse and wicked, ...	445		
Secret faults (See FAULTS), ...	92		
Seek Him, the former mercies of God an encouragement to, ...	503		
a grateful recollection of former mer- cies, ...	503		

	PAGE		PAGE
the worth of spiritual sacrifices in the Divine service, they are enjoined by God, they secure His blessing, and are a means by which we glorify Him, ...	248	Sins, presumptuous, ...	93
Shadow, man a walking, ...	188	what they are, ...	93
life a journey, ...	188	out of what they arise, ...	93
a journey prosecuted falsely, ...	188	the tyranny which they exercise, ...	94
Sheltering rock, the, ...	306	the absolute sin in which they cul- minate, ...	94
Shepherd and his flock, the Divine, the Divine Shepherd supplies every want, ...	111	Sincerity not enough, ...	129
affords tranquillising rest to the weary, ...	111	Situation, hope in the saddest (See HOPE), ...	194
prepares the soul for the loftiest service, ...	112	Slander, ...	58
provides protection and consolation in the darkest peril, ...	112	the nature of, ...	58
Shepherd of Israel, the, ...	466	the evil of, ...	58
the relation which He sustains, ...	466	the cure for, ...	58
the service which He renders, and, ...	466	Slander, ... 185, 203, 206, 358	
the manifestation of Himself to His people, ...	466	Smile, salvation in God's (See SALVA- TION), ...	467
the great desire of His people from Him, ...	466	Solicitude of God, the, for the well-being of man, ...	473
Shield, God's, ...	82	is very deep, ...	474
indicates the availableness of His help, ...	82	has respect to his various needs, ...	474
the many-sidedness of His protecting love, ...	83	recognises the great conditions of his well-being, receiving communica- tions from and rendering obedience to God, ...	475
the invincibility of His strength, ...	83	is exercised in harmony with man's moral freedom, ...	475
Shield, the Lord God a sun and, ...	489	Song of Deliverance, a (See DELIVER- ANCE), ...	109
the figures, ...	489	Song of loves, a, ...	220
the facts, ...	489	Song of praise, a (See PRAISE), ...	157
the persons, ...	490	Song to the Lord, a, ...	140
Shoshannim, ...	220	the singers, His saints, ...	140
Shushan-eduth, ...	300	the song, its theme, spirit, and occa- sion, ...	140
Sickness, thoughts on recovery from, God's hand in sending sickness, ...	139	Sorrow and mercy justly distributed, ...	152
His mercy in alleviating it, ...	139	the sorrows of the wicked, many, self- caused, inevitable, ...	152
His lovingkindness in restoring from it, ...	139	the mercy promised to the righteous, mark their character and blessed- ness, ...	152
Silence in trouble (See TROUBLE), ...	182	Sorrow for sin, ...	21
Sin and Divine judgment, human, ...	446	the necessity for such sorrow, ...	21
human sin, the nature and aggrava- tion of the sin of the Israelites, ...	446	mistakes concerning it, ...	21
Divine judgment, against Israel re- veals God's observation of man's life, God as affected by man's life, punishment growing out of man's sin, punishment brought about by the forces of nature, ...	447	the efficacy of it, ...	22
Sin, sorrow for (See SORROW), ...	21	Sorrowful complaint, a, an earnest prayer, and a devout resolution (See COMPLAINT), ...	459
Sin, the chief evil of (See EVIL), ...	256	Soul, a godly, under a sense of absence from God, ...	206
Sin, the exposure and punishment of, ...	101	the sorrow of a godly soul, its cause, aggravation, and continuousness, ...	206
the exposure of sin is inevitable, ...	101	the desire of a godly soul, its object and intensity, ...	206
will extend to the inmost feelings of the heart, ...	102	the hope of a godly soul, whom he hoped in, what he hoped for, where- on he grounded his hope, ...	207
its punishment will be terrible and complete, ...	102	Soul, a godly, the deep depression and strong consolation of, ...	208
Sin, the hold of (See HOLD), ...	200	his depression, the greatness of his troubles, their causes, their relation to God, ...	208
Sin, the self-punishing nature of (See NATURE), ...	27	his consolation, in the remembrance of God, in the assurance of His con- stant mercy, in access to Him in prayer, in anticipation of deliver- ance from trouble, ...	209
Sins, besetting, ...	79	Soul eclipses (See ECLIPSES), ...	49
we are all the subjects of special weaknesses and temptations, ...	79	Soul, man speaking to his, ...	208
observations touching this particular class of sins, ...	80		

	PAGE		PAGE
self-remonstrance, ...	208	the gradualness of the education of mankind, and the truth of the Sacred Scriptures, ...	363
self-exhortation, ...	208	Suffering, the loneliness of, ...	106
self-encouragement, ...	208	oppresses the soul with a sense of personal unworthiness, ...	106
Soul perplexity (See PERPLEXITY), ...	39	throws the mind back upon the thought of the Divine care from the earliest period of life, ...	107
Soul, the anticipation of the godly (See ANTICIPATION), ...	320	is embittered by the violence and cruelty of relentless enemies, ...	107
Soul, the attitude of a victorious (See ATTITUDE), ...	400	intensifies the sense of utter helplessness and agony, ...	107
Soul, the declaration of a grateful (See DECLARATION), ...	337	Suggestions to a godly soul in trouble, ...	432
Soul, the satisfaction of the godly (See SATISFACTION), ...	317	Sun and shield, the Lord God a (See SHIELD), ...	489
Soul, the thirst of the godly (See THIRST), ...	314	Supernatural, Nature and the (See NATURE), ...	74
Sovereignty of God, illustrations of the, ...	457	Supplication, an earnest, ...	492
God arousing Himself to interpose in human affairs, ...	457	with a view to their salvation the people pray for repentance, ...	492
rejecting men from the possession of privileges, ...	457	the deliverance which is implored is represented as, a cessation of God's anger, ...	492
selecting men to the possession of privileges and the performance of duties, ...	457	a manifestation of His mercy, ...	492
establishing a beneficent institution, ...	458	a quickening, ...	493
confering benefits on men, ...	458	a means to their joy in God, ...	493
Sovereignty of God, the, ...	409	Supplication in trouble (See TROUBLE), ...	189
loyally acknowledged, ...	410	Supremacy of God an encouragement to seek Him, the (See SEEK), ...	500
of ancient date, ...	410	Survey of redemption work, ...	128
beneficent in operation, ...	410	Sustainer, man's burden and (See BURDEN), ...	279
a plea for His help, ...	410		
Speaker, the listener, the peace, the, ...	497	Tactics of the tempted, the, ...	46
the listener, ...	497	Temple, nature God's, ...	138
the speaker, ...	497	built by His hand, ...	138
the message, ...	498	hallowed by His presence, ...	138
the confidence, ...	498	consecrated to His worship, ...	138
the issue, ...	498	Tempted, tactics of the, ...	46
Speaking to his soul, man (See SOUL), ...	208	Theology, natural, ...	86
Speech in trouble (See TROUBLE), ...	185	the subject, ...	86
Spiritual infirmities (See INFIRMITIES), ...	435	the characteristics, ...	87
Stars, the Gospel of the (See CREATION), ...	28	the importance, ...	87
State of the godly in this world, the, ...	287	the limitation of this revelation, ...	88
a divinely delivered, ...	287	Things for good people, good (See GOOD), ...	78
sustained, and, ...	287	Thirst of the godly soul, the, ...	314
approved state, ...	287	the nature, ...	314
Steps in dangerous paths, safe (See PATHS), ...	64	the occasion, ...	314
Story of a sufferer, the, ...	144	the reason of, ...	314
the Divine listener, ...	144	the relation of this thirst to the praise of God, ...	315
the sad complaint, ...	144	Thought, man's need and God's (See NEED), ...	200
the relieved sufferer, ...	145	Thoughts and inquiries of a godly soul in trouble, the (See TROUBLE), ...	431
Sufferer, the story of a (See STORY), ...	144	Thoughts on recovery from sickness (See SICKNESS), ...	139
Suffering, the cry of the righteous in extreme, ...	357	Three views of religion (See RELIGION), ...	159
a cry of suffering, the nature and severity of his sufferings, ...	357	Thunderstorm, the true attitude of man in the, ...	136
a cry of supplication, comprising a confession, petitions, and encouragements, ...	359	to hear the voice of God in, ...	136
Suffering, the hope of the righteous in extreme, ...	365	to adore the glory of God in, ...	137
what he hoped for, ...	365	to confide in God as the Almighty Ruler of the thunderstorm, ...	137
the ground, ...	365	Topics for prayer, invariable (See PRAYER), ...	119
the influence, and, ...	366		
the anticipated result of this hope, ...	366		
Suffering, the imperfection of the righteous in extreme, ...	362		
consider, the imprecations urged, ...	303		
the reason assigned : impresses with, the imperfection of the best men, ...			

	PAGE		PAGE
Transition of a troubled soul from conflict to victory, the, . . .	396	to, by the devout contemplation of the works and ways of God, . . .	433
was marked by thoughtful consideration of others, . . .	396	the troubled soul's consideration of the works and ways of God, recollection of, reflection on, and speech concerning the works and ways of God, . . .	433
personal effort for himself, . . .	396	the troubled soul's conclusions on the works and ways of God, God's works and ways reveal His strength, His majesty, His holiness, His beneficence, and they are mysterious, . . .	434
approach unto God, . . .	397	Trouble, the thoughts and inquiries of a godly soul in, . . .	431
Trial and triumph of faith, the (See FAITH), . . .	308	the thoughts, reflection on the past doings of God, recollection of times of trouble in his own life, which were also times of song, communion with his own heart, . . .	431
Trial, sanctified, . . .	66	the inquiries, as to God's mindfulness of His people, as to His unchangeableness, as to His faithfulness, . . .	432
drives us nearer God, . . .	66	suggestions to a godly soul in trouble, . . .	432
conducts to a higher spiritual life, . . .	67	Trouble, vows made in, . . .	426
awakens longings for the heavenly and eternal life, . . .	67	Troubled life, a glimpse of a (See LIFE), . . .	270
Triumphant confidence, a (See CONFIDENCE), . . .	278	True love (See LOVE), . . .	70
Triumphant life, a glimpse of a (See LIFE), . . .	271	Trust and prayer, . . .	370
Triumph of the Church, the, . . .	347	the good man's trust was in a Divine Person, sustaining personal relations to His creatures, who has given gracious assurances of salvation to His people, . . .	370
in its source, the Lord gives the word of command, of promise, and of power, . . .	347	the good man's prayer, for Divine audience, deliverance, protection, and vindication, . . .	370
in its completeness, the utter rout of the foes, the greatness of the spoil, the subsequent prosperity, . . .	348	Trust in God, times of fear and, . . .	283
in its celebration, . . .	348	Trusting in riches, the folly of, . . .	266
Trouble and Deliverer, the good man's, his trouble, was continuous, his soul accepted no consolation, the remembrance of God was painful, meditation increased grief, . . .	427	Truths, the personal realisation of general (See PERSONAL), . . .	37
his Deliverer, his application to God involved faith, was persevering and earnest, did not lead to immediate relief, . . .	428	Turtle-dove, the Church a, . . .	414
Trouble and the way out of it, . . .	123	ULTIMATE reasons (See REASONS), . . .	77
sin is the prolific source of all trouble, . . .	123	Urgency in prayer, . . .	368
trouble shall not be permitted to overwhelm the good, . . .	123	implies a deep sense of present and immediate need, . . .	368
prayer to God is the infallible method of deliverance from the greatest trouble, . . .	124	apparent delay in answering prayer, . . .	368
Trouble, prayer in (See PRAYER), . . .	429	strong faith in the entreatableness of God, . . .	369
Trouble, resource and comfort in, . . .	249	VALUE of dying experiences, the (See EXPERIENCES), . . .	395
Trouble, silence in, . . .	182	Verdicts, mistaken (See MISTAKEN), . . .	11
silence maintained in, . . .	182	Victorious march of the good, the (See MARCH), . . .	343
increasing trouble, . . .	183	Victory, confidence in Jehovah a pledge of (See CONFIDENCE), . . .	97
growing insupportable in trouble, . . .	184	Victory for Christ and victory in Christ (See CHRIST), . . .	85
Trouble, speech in, . . .	185	Victory, the transition of a troubled soul from conflict to (See TRANSITION), . . .	396
the Psalmist's, reveals his desire to know the duration of his life, . . .	185	Views of religion, three (See RELIGION), . . .	150
his impression of the brevity of his life, . . .	186	Vow, David's prayer and, . . .	258
his impression of the vanity of life, . . .	186	Vows made in trouble, . . .	426
his impatience of life, . . .	187	WAR, God as a man of, . . .	26
his want of clear and assured knowledge of any life beyond the present, . . .	187		
Trouble, supplication in, . . .	189		
the confidence avowed, . . .	189		
the submission expressed, . . .	189		
the petitions presented, . . .	190		
the pleas urged, . . .	190		
Trouble, the day of trouble, . . .	502		
a period with which all men are acquainted, . . .	502		
a resolve which all men should make, . . .	502		
a result which all men may anticipate, . . .	503		
Trouble, the godly soul rising superior			

	PAGE		PAGE
the Divine admonition, ...	26	Wickedness, the history of human, ...	293
amnesty, ...	26	wickedness in its root, ...	293
arsenal, the variety, readiness, and		in its manifestation, ...	293
deadly efficacy of His weapons, ...	26	in its full development, ...	293
War, the holy, ...	6	in its consummation, ...	294
the revolt against Messiah, its extent, ...	6	as viewed in its ultimate aspects, ...	295
determination, ...	6	Wisdom, the preacher of (See PREACH- ER), ...	239
secret cause, ...	6	Wisdom, two counsels of (See COUN- SELS), ...	147
vanity, ...	7	Withdrawal of the Divine presence, the (See PRESENCE), ...	454
Way for man, the Divine, ...	505	Work, survey of redemption, ...	128
indicated by God, ...	505	Works, praising God for His mighty (See PRAISING), ...	334
trod by man, ...	505	World, a tumultuous, and a tranquil Church, ...	228
the need of integrity of heart to tread it, ...	505	a tumultuous world, the tumult is an evidence of the sin of the world, and will one day be removed, ...	228
Way of wealthy worldlings, the foolish, the characteristics of, trust in their wealth, boasting in their wealth, ...	241	a tranquil Church, an assurance of security, and of refreshment, ...	229
fancied power to retain wealth, ...	241	World, hope opened to the, ...	389
the folly of, is seen in their in- ability to retain their wealth, and the limitation of the power of wealth, ...	241	World, men of the (See MEN), ...	68
Way out of trouble, the (See TROUBLE), ...	123	World, men of the, who have their portion in this life (See MEN), ...	243
Ways of God made plain, the hidden, ...	121	World, the Divine proprietorship of the, ...	114
the character of God is a guarantee of infallible direction, ...	121	is absolute and all-inclusive, ...	114
the ways of God are made known to the morally needy, ...	121	is based on the act of creation, ...	115
the deeper revelations of God are re- served for the morally good, ...	122	is confirmed by the fact of its preser- vation, ...	115
the revelation of the hidden ways of God is morally satisfying, ...	123	Worldlings, the foolish way of wealthy (See WAY), ...	241
Ways of God, the, ...	437	Worship, aspects of Divine, ...	325
are vast in their extent, ...	437	worship in its source, God, who grants the opportunity and inspires the disposition to worship, ...	325
profound in their meaning, ...	437	in its Object, God, as the hearer of prayer, the pardoner of sin, the satisfier of the soul, ...	325
mysterious in their aspect, ...	437	in its nature, submission to the will, celebration of the praise, and fulfil- ment of our vows to God, ...	325
Well-founded assurance, a (See ASSUR- ANCE), ...	213	in its locality, ...	326
Wicked against the good, the plottings of the (See PLOTTINGS), ...	174	in its extent, ...	326
Wicked life, the distinguishing charac- teristics of a, ...	169	in its influence, ...	326
practical atheism, ...	169	Worship, public, more acceptable to God than private devotion (See PUBLIC), ...	508
self-adulation, ...	169	Worship, religious, ...	227
verbal profanity, ...	170	its nature, internal principles, external manifestations, ...	227
unwisdom, ...	170	its ground and reason, "He is thy Lord,"	227
cunning artifices, ...	170	its importance, ...	227
Wicked, the pilgrimage of the (See PIL- GRIMAGE), ...	480	Worship, religious, ...	471
Wicked, the present position and future prospects of the, as seen by the spi- ritually enlightened man (See POSI- TION), ...	398	in its Object, a Person related to us, of supreme excellence, ...	472
Wicked, the relation of God to the, ...	18	in its character, hearty, joyous, vari- ously expressed, ...	472
He has no pleasure in, ...	18	in its obligation, it is right, and need- ful, ...	472
does not tolerate, but, ...	18	in its incentives, ...	473
hates wickedness, ...	18	Worship, the character of true, ...	154
Wicked, the temporal prosperity of the (See PROSPERITY), ...	392	the worship of God is the chief joy of the good, ...	154
Wicked, the temporal prosperity of the, as contrasted with the peaceful des- tiny of the good (See CONTRASTED), ...	178	the highest duty of the good, ...	154
Wicked, the transient prosperity of the, unworthy the envy of the good (See PROSPERITY), ...	171	the noblest employment of the good, ...	154
Wicked, with his much, the righteous and his little better than the (See LITTLE), ...	175		

	PAGE		PAGE
Worship, the reasonableness of . . .	154	is the representative of a distinctive	
God is to be worshipped because He		and privileged class, . . .	117
is the God of creation, . . .	154	Wrath, God glorified through man's, .	425
providence, . . .	155	the wrath of man not unfrequently de-	
redemption, . . .	156	feats its own aims and accomplishes	
Worshipper, the moral fitness of the		the Divine purpose, . . .	425
true, . . .	116	is sometimes the instrument of the	
it is the privilege of the true		Divine will, . . .	426
worshipper to approach near to		man in his wrath accomplishes the	
God, . . .	116	Divine will when setting himself	
the true worshipper must possess a		to resist and frustrate it, . . .	426
moral fitness, . . .	116		
is assured of the Divine benedic-		ZION, Mount, . . .	236, 423, 511
tion, . . .	117	Zion, the prosperity of, sought, . . .	262

INDEX TO AUTHORS QUOTED.

Very brief quotations are not indicated in this Index.

ÆSCHYLUS, 136.
Alexander, J. A., 12, 55, 59, 105, 362.
Alford, Henry, 224, 428.
Anon., 262, 281, 283, 286, 289, 290, 292,
299, 312, 315, 327, 373.

BAILEY, P. J., 390, 420, 433.
Barnes, Albert, 369.
Barzia, Joseph de, 27.
B—e, 435.
Billing, R. C., 261.
Binnie, W., 56.
Blaikie, W. G., 165.
Bonar, A. A., 126, 162.
Bonar, H., 497.
Brown, J., 161.
Brown, J. Baldwin, 259, 374.
Browning, R., 122.
Bryant, W. C., 146.
Burns, Jabez, 273, 342.
Bushnell, Horace, 197.
Byron, Lord, 423, 424, 433.

CANDLISH, Dr., 150.
Cowper, W., 146, 152, 156, 268, 274.

D., B., 441.
Dale, R. W., 246.
Davenant, W., 33.
Davison, Francis, 114.
Douglas, A. F., 312.
Dryden, John, 437.

EMERSON, Ralph, 256.

F—R, 258.

GAMBOLD, 398.
Goethe, J. W., 121, 153.
Goldsmith, Oliver, 277, 436.
Grant, Robert, 371.
Gray, Thomas, 145.
Guernsey, Jesse, 379.
H—, 351.
Hart, J., 215.
Hemans, Felicia D., 275.
Hengstenberg, E. W., 313, 348, 403, 507.
Henry, Matthew, 193, 204.
Heraud, J. A., 436.
Herbert, George, 339.
Hickok, L. P., 508.
"Homiletic Quarterly," the, 261, 339.
Hood, E. P., 240.
Horne, George, 52, 91.
Hull, E. L., 459.
Huntington, F. D., 386.

KEBLE, John, 473.

LIDDON, H. P., 159, 220, 381.
Lillo, George, 416.

M'A., 243.
Maclaren, Alexander, 111.
Mallet, D., 187, 381, 382.
Mant, Bishop, 70.
Marston, J., 382.
Martin, S., 99.
Melvill, Henry, 152.
Milman, H. H., 455.
Milton, John, 136, 141, 148, 185, 411.
Moll, Carl B., 33, 364.

- Montgomery, J., 385.
 More, Hannah, 358, 450.
 Murphy, 153, 155, 157, 165.
- NEWTON, John, 270.
- ONE HUNDRED SKETCHES OF SERMONS,
 243, 351, 387.
 Osorious, John, 16.
- PARKER, Joseph, 195, 305, 494.
 Payson, Edward, 430.
 Perowne, J. J. S., 1, 5, 46, 49, 94, 105, 114,
 119, 124, 135, 138, 140, 148, 162, 163.
 Phillips, George, 28, 44, 64, 86, 87.
 Pollok, Robert, 184, 439.
 Punshon, W. M., 377.
- R., J., 323.
 Robertson, F. W., 206, 253.
 Ryland, 99.
- SHAKESPEARE, W., 17, 169, 185, 277, 382,
 416, 422, 431, 440, 442, 443, 448, 452, 463,
 479.
 Sleigh, William, 194, 249, 389, 510.
 Smith, Horace, 138.
- Smith, John, 255.
 Smith, Walter, 153.
 Spencer, John, 156.
- Spurgeon, C. H., 379, 476.
 Stanley, A. P., 236, 506.
 Statham, W. M., 319.
 Stockdale, George, 306.
 Stuart, Moses, 362.
- TENNYSON, Alfred, 135, 168, 382, 396, 428,
 433, 436, 487.
 Thomas, David, 126, 127, 162.
 Thomson, James, 330.
 Thomson, W. M., 236.
 Tipple, S. A., 331.
 Twisleton, E. T. B., 347.
- UPHAM, T. C., 429.
- W., J., 200.
 Wardlaw, Ralph, 501.
 Watson, Richard, 212, 227, 332.
 Watson, Thomas, 14.
 Watts, Isaac, 383.
 Wesley, Charles, 52, 456, 486, 505.
 Wordsworth, William, 51, 125, 145.
- YOUNG, Edward, 138, 406, 433.
 "Young Minister's Companion," the, 258,
 489.
 Y., W., 425.
- ZINZENDORF, N. L., 438.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

PSALMS.

BY REV. W. L. WATKINSON.

PSALM I.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm seems to have been placed first in the collection, because, from its general character and subject, it formed a suitable introduction to the rest. It treats of the blessedness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked—topics which constantly recur in the psalms, but it treats of them as if all experience pointed only in one direction. The moral problem which in other psalms troubles the ancient poets of Israel, when they see the evil prospering and the good oppressed, has here no place. The poet rests calmly in the truth that it is well with the righteous. He is not vexed with those passionate questionings of heart which meet us in such psalms as the 37th and 73d. Hence we may probably conclude that his lot was cast in happier and more peaceful times."—*Perowne*.

THE BLESSED LIFE.

(Verses 1-3.)

Consider :

I. The secret of the blessed life.

"Blessed is the man that walketh *not* in the counsel of the ungodly," &c. (ver. 1.)

Wherever blessedness is to be found, it is not in these directions. What a direct contradiction is this first verse to the world's philosophy! To keep the law may be safe, but it is to walk in the common light of day; to follow one's own counsels is to dwell in the purple light of pleasure. So argues the natural man; and here the Psalmist gives a flat denial to his argument. The world is wrong; the Psalmist is right. Blessed is the man who abstains from ungodly policy, iniquitous action, scornful use of things divine and holy. According to a custom which is generally recognised in Central Africa, whenever a caravan mistakes its way, and is obliged to retrace its steps and return to a road from

which it has deviated, a bough is thrown across the wrong path, and a furrow is scratched in the ground by means of the feet, so that no succeeding caravan may fall into the same error. Thus the generations which have gone astray have declared that the ways of ungodliness and sin are ways of bitterness and disappointment, and they have left their emphatic and sorrowful testimonies as boughs and furrows across these false ways, to admonish us to seek another and a truer path.

But a merely negative goodness will not ensure us true blessedness, therefore the Psalmist proceeds to lay down the grand secret of blessedness in profound spiritual words. "*But his delight is in the law of the Lord.*" How truly profound! How superior to the superficial theories of happiness which human moralists have from time to time put forth! *Whichcote* truly says: "Duty

and happiness are vital acts, and must be put forth from vital principles." The vital principle is here declared. "The philosophers' discourses of this subject are but learned dotages. David saith more to the point in this short psalm than any or all of them put together; they did but beat the bush. God hath put the bird into our hands."—*Trapp*.

The secret of bliss is the right attitude of the soul to the truth of God.

1. A right relation of the *will* to the law of God. "But his will is in the law of the Lord."—*Luther*. The bias of the will is toward Divine truth. The "ungodly" are self-willed, and walk after their own "counsel;" the "blessed" man consults the Divine will, and is ever longing for the path of God's commandments. "The 'will' which is here signified is that delight of heart, and that certain pleasure, in the law, which does not look at what the law promises, nor at what it threatens, but at this only, that 'the law is holy, and just, and good.' Hence it is not only a love of the law, but that loving delight in the law which no prosperity, nor adversity, nor the world, nor the prince of it, can either take away or destroy; for it victoriously bursts its way through poverty, evil report, the cross, death, and hell, and in the midst of adversities shines the brightest."—*Luther*, quoted by *Spurgeon*.

2. A right relation of the *affections* to the law of God. "*His delight*." "The law is more than a mere rule, after which the man is to frame his outward life."—*Perowne*. It fills with admiration and delight. But can the law of God thus excite the affections and rejoice the heart? Yes; for, as Festus sings—

"Law is love defined."

The godly man beholds in the spiritual law the declaration of the Divine nature, which is essential love, and he delights in that law after the inner man.

3. A right relation of the *intelligence* to the law of God. "He *meditates* on the law day and night." We must *know* the law if we are to perceive its beauty and appreciate its worth, and the more

we know of it, the greater shall be our joy in it. Many skim the Bible as a novel, when they should ponder it, and master it, line by line, like a grammar. He who is ignorant of the Divine law, or misconceives it, cannot know true freedom and blessedness; but he whose eyes are opened to the deep things of the law, walks at liberty, and knows peace unspeakable.

Let us not seek bliss in things of time and sense, but let us labour to know the will of God, and to have our hearts harmonised with that will, and we shall find rest to our souls.

Consider :

II. The picture of the blessed life.

"He shall be like a tree planted," &c. (ver. 3.)

1. The *security* of this blessedness. "*Planted by the rivers of water*." "Planted" means firmly planted. "Rivers," indicate unfailing refreshment of spirit; the streams of Divine truth and influence. Carnal joys flourish and wither with changing circumstances, but his joy abides whose life is rooted in God. "His soul, watered by the streams of Paradise, knows not the parched season of the sunburnt heath."—*Sutcliffe*. "By the side of the streams in the East may be seen trees, at all seasons covered with luxurious verdure, blossoms, or fruit; whilst at a distance, where no water is, may be seen dwarfish and unhealthy trees, with scarcely a leaf to shake in the winds of heaven."—*Roberts*. Thus, drinking supplies from the living streams of God's truth, our life is ever strong and blessed, whilst we faint and fade where no such water is.

2. The *manifestation* of this blessedness. The godly man is known by the *beneficence of his life*. "Bringeth forth his fruit in his season." The truly blessed life is a life of beneficence; and if we delight in God's law, it shall perfect our individual character, fit us for the sphere and season in which we live, and make us a blessing to our generation. "As with a palm-tree, all that is in it is profitable—leaves, wood, and fruit—so also with the Christian, all that he does is to redound to the honour of the Divine name and the benefit of his

neighbour."—*Starke*. The godly man is known by the beauty of his character. "His leaf also shall not wither." As the foliage of the tree is its beauty and glory, so shall delight in the law of the Lord give grace and majesty to the character. In inner rectitude is the secret of all true and high visible excellence; out of a heart right with God spring all the poetry and utilities of life.

3. The *perpetuity* of this blessedness. The tree by the watercourses abides in bloom and fruition, and the joy and glory which spring in the heart and life of the lover of God's Word are perennial and permanent. Our scientific gardeners enthusiastically anticipate the day when, through special culture, all our roses will have evergreen foliage, brilliant and fragrant flowers, and the habit of blooming for a greater part of the year. He whose life is grounded in the Divine truth and goodness, who draws daily vitality from the river of God's pleasure, is an evergreen, and blooms all the year long, all life long, and death itself cannot blight his glory, or destroy his joy.

4. The *universality* of this blessedness. "And whatsoever he doeth shall

prosper." "He shall prosper in whatsoever he doeth."—*Wordsworth*. Deference to the law of God secures universal prosperity. God's blessing is on all the handiwork of the godly, and directs it to blessed and prosperous issues.

"Oh! the blessednesses" of the man who delights in the law of the Lord. As we long for the beatitudes, let us put ourselves in God's hands. "*Planted by the river.*" "This is properly used of a *transplanted* tree. He is not left to the efforts of nature, but taken beneath the gardener's care, and placed in a favourable soil."—*Kay*. "Man is *righteous*, not by birth or nature, or through his own power, skill, or activity, but by the *Divine agency*, through the *means of grace* which Divine mercy has established for us, as a tree planted by an abundant and flowing brook, if he, like the tree, *take up into his own life, from the means afforded him by God, that which is necessary to his life and growth.*"—*Moll*.

May God take us from the wilds of nature, graft us into Christ, nourish us by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and thus shall we bear our fruit unto holiness, and in the end everlasting life.

THE PROGRAMME OF EVIL.

Psalm i. 1.

"A climax is to be noted here in the choice of expressions. Thus we have, first, three degrees of habit, in the verbs 'walked,' 'stood,' 'sat,' next, three degrees of evil in the character, the 'wicked,' the 'sinners,' and the 'mockers,' lastly, three degrees of openness in the evil-doing, 'counsel,' 'way,' 'seat.'"—*Perowne*.

We see here:

I. The evil life in its inception.

"Walketh in the counsel of the ungodly."

The word used in the original for "ungodly" signifies the "loose man, the man loose from God."—*Delitzsch*. We see here that ungodliness is the source of all evil; "becoming loose to God," is the point of departure to positive and universal unrighteousness. This great truth is often forgotten; and where actual sin would be denounced, ungodliness is often regarded with indulgence. Indeed, that temper of mind which is loose from God is by many

considered the most philosophic and desirable condition of the mind; the morality loose from God, the truest morality; the science loose from God, the wisest science; the character loose from God, the most sound and noble character. The Psalmist in this place indicates the profound error of such reasoning. Looseness from God, ungodliness, is the original and fertile source of all transgression. Enmity with God is enmity with righteousness. The Psalmist teaches this same doctrine of the connection of atheism with transgression in Psalm xiv. 1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no

God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good." Beware of ungodly thoughts! Beware of a morality not built upon theology! Beware of an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God!

And this ungodliness *seeks to justify itself*. "The counsel of the ungodly." Men are anxious that their opinions and conduct should have the sanction of reason, and so they seek to justify their ungodliness to their understanding. "No one sins without making some excuse to himself for sinning. He is obliged to do so: man is not like the brute beasts; he has a Divine gift within him which we call reason, and which constrains him to give an account to it for what he does. He cannot act at random; however he acts, he must act by some kind of rule or some sort of principle, else he is vexed and dissatisfied with himself. Not that he is very particular whether he finds a good reason or a bad, when he is very much straitened for a reason, but a reason of some sort he must have."—*Newman*. Reason is never used in a more unnatural, ignoble, hopeless task, than when it is pressed into the service of atheism and irreligion: but it is pressed into such service, tortured and perverted, until the godless theory of life is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and looks a very clever and plausible thing. The maxims which are used to justify a godless science and a godless life are essentially stupid and false, yet how frequently they wear a most philosophic air! Here, then, is the beginning of evil—an *irreligious, ungodly way of thinking*.

II. The evil life in its development.

1. "*Standeth in the way of sinners.*" By "sinners" are intended those "who pass their lives in sin, especially coarse and manifest sin."—*Delitzsch*. "Open and avowed offenders, habitual transgressors."—*Kay*. Here sinful thought has passed into conduct, action, life. We cannot hold unbelieving theories with impunity. Ideas rule men, ideas rule the world, and ideas fundamentally false, as are those of atheism, must soon work disaster, both

in individual and national life. He who in thought lingers on the forbidden ground of scepticism, next takes his place with actual offenders against the law. Nothing is more evident than that loose thinking and loose living go together.

2. "*Sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*" "The scornful are the men who deride the thought of religious obligation."—*Kay*. They delight in the company of those who scoff at religion. This state, and it is soon reached, argues the most desperate wickedness. There is something so exalted in reverence, that some commentators have expressed a sentiment of respect for Jacob, who buried his false gods with tenderness; but how utterly dead to every noble quality is the man who can blaspheme the true God and His Word! Here the poison-seed of unbelief has opened into the full-blown flower of wickedness. "The beginnings of sin are modest, the issues of it are impudent."—*Whichcote*.

III. The evil life in its consummation.

The man is *blessed* who walketh *not* in the counsel of the ungodly; it follows that he is *cursed* who *does* follow ungodly counsels and conduct. "Cursed in his counsels, cursed in his actions, cursed in his end."—*Clarke*. The further he goes, the further he is from blessedness.

We are reminded in this verse:

1. Of the *insinuating* nature of sin. It glides stealthily into the heart—stealthily into the life.

2. Of the *prolific* nature of sin. One sin leads to *another* sin; one sin leads to a *darker* sin; one sin leads to *many* sins. It is a traveller's tale which tells that the Indian spiders weave webs so strong that men are sometimes imprisoned by them; but it is no fable that from the gossamer threads of ungodly thoughts, and slender transgressions, come at length dark convictions and habits which hold men in most cruel bondage.

3. Of the *accursed* nature of sin. It fills with misery; it ends in death. What God curses withers away. Let us pray, then, that we enter not into the path of the wicked.

RESULTS.

(Verses 4-6.)

I. The destinies of men are various.

The godly flourish evermore: "The ungodly are not so." The pious and the wicked are together in this world, but the text indicates that a separation will be effected. "They are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." "This allusion describes the instability of the principles of the ungodly, rather than of their fortunes. Their want of principle is opposed to the good man's steady meditation of Jehovah's law, which is the foundation of his prosperity. On the other hand, because the ungodly want this principle, therefore they shall not stand in the judgment."—*Horsley*. The ungodly have instability of principle, and *therefore* instability of fortune. "Their glory shall not descend after them."

II. The destinies of men are decided by their moral character and conduct.

† "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." "Because they are like chaff, without root below, without fruit above, without spiritual vitality; therefore, on account of their inner worthlessness and instability, they do not stand."—*Delitzsch*. "Although the ungodly are in similar circumstances with the righteous, yet they derive no profit from this favourable circumstance. They are *spiritually dead* and withered. That which has matured in them has faded prematurely; for they have not appropriated to themselves the nourishment

of life, and they have not formed in themselves the faculty for this appropriation. Without root and without sap, they have not attained any vigour, nor brought forth any fruit (Matt. xxi. 19). Thus they have *ripened only for destruction*; unsubstantial and worthless as chaff, the sport of the wind until scattered by the storm, they go to destruction, and leave no trace behind."—*Moll*. And the righteous stand *because* they are righteous. Not chance, not social rank, not birth, not intellectual culture, not religious profession, not Divine decrees, shall determine our destiny, but our spirit and course of life.

III. The destinies of men are as widely contrasted as their character.

The righteous bloom for ever in the paradise of God; the wicked are driven away as chaff in the whirlwind of the Divine anger. "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 12). And this teaching of the Scriptures commends itself to reason. "Nothing is more credible than that men's states shall differ as much as their spirits and tempers do differ."—*Whichcote*.

Blessed is the man whose will and life are thoroughly identified with the Divine law; for the law shall stand for ever, and none shall suffer loss who enjoy its shelter!

PSALM II.

INTRODUCTION.

"It is quite impossible now to say what the event was which occasioned this poem. The older interpreters referred it to David, and the attacks made upon him by the Philistines (2 Sam. v.) But though the poem was occasioned by some national event, we must not confine its application to that event, nor need we even suppose that the singer himself did not feel that his words went beyond their first occasion. He begins to speak of an earthly king, and his wars with the nations of the earth, but his words are too great to have all their meaning exhausted in David, or Solomon, or Ahaz, or any Jewish monarch. Or ever he is aware, the local and the temporal are swallowed up in the universal and the eternal. The king who sits on David's throne has become glorified and transfigured in the light of the promise. The picture is half ideal, half actual. It concerns itself with the present, but with that only so far as it is typical of greater things to come. The true King, who to the Prophet's mind is to fulfil all his

largest hopes, has taken the place of the visible and earthly king. The nations are not merely those who are now mustering for the battle, but whatsoever opposeth and exalteth itself against Jehovah and His Anointed."—*Perowne*.

THE HOLY WAR.

Whilst we ought to be careful, and not fall into the mistake of the mystical interpreters, who see the prefiguration of the Messiah in almost every psalm, we must not fall into the far greater error of the rationalistic critics, who cannot find predictions of the Messiah in any. In nature, types are always thrown off before the archetype appears; outline sketches are given long before the ideal is realised. And we are perfectly justified in finding in the character and history of David the rough outline and prefiguration of the glorious ideal King, whose reign is a reign of righteousness, and whose kingdom cannot be moved. In this psalm we have a vivid picture of **The revolt against Messiah.**

Consider:

I. The extent of the revolt.

"Nations." "Peoples." "Kings."
"Rulers" (ver. 1, 2).

The reign and kingdom of Christ has always encountered violent opposition. The decree is, "Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies;" and Christ has ever had to contend with opposition to His generous aims. He has encountered this opposition—(1.) In all *nations*—Jew, Roman, Greek. (2.) In all *ranks*. "Kings," "peoples;" monarchs, and mobs have resisted the Christian faith, and joined to crush it. (3.) In all *generations*. Christ was rejected by His own age (Acts iv. 27); and the pages of Church history are crowded with the records of a warfare that has never slept since the Church was founded; and, unless we misread the Apocalypse, fierce and bloody days are yet before the Church of Christ.

II. The determination by which this revolt is characterised.

It is (1.) *Deliberate*. "They take counsel." They "imagine," *i.e.*, devise. They ponder in their heart, and bring forth their strongest reasons and most subtle schemes. (2.) *Combined*. "They take counsel together." Strange combinations have been, and still are being,

formed against Christ. (3.) *Resolute*. "Set themselves." "Stand up against."—*Prayer-Book*. "The word used here is the word used of Goliath taking up his station to defy Israel."—*Kay*. A most resolute and defiant attitude. "One would have expected that so great a blessing to this world should have been universally welcomed and embraced, and that every sheaf should immediately have bowed to that of the Messiah, and all the crowns and sceptres on earth should have been laid at His feet; but it proves quite contrary. Never were the notions of any sect of philosophers, though never so absurd, nor the power of any prince or state, though never so tyrannical, opposed with so much violence as the doctrine and government of Christ."—*M. Henry*. "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke xix. 14).

III. The secret cause of this revolt.

"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (ver. 3).

They rebel against the law of God in Christ. The law of God, as declared in Christ, is a law requiring great denials and sacrifices to men, the foundations of whose nature are out of course; and for this reason it is distasteful to us, and we reject it. "Doctrines would be readily believed if they involved in them no precepts; and the Church may be tolerated by the world if she will only give up her discipline."—*Horne*. The yoke of Christ is easy, and His burden light to the penitent and enlightened heart; but to the blind and self-willed the law of Christ is as the "bands" and "cords" which the yoked oxen are eager to cast off. Men may give a score reasons for their hostility to Christ, such as the incredibility of miracles, the faults of Christians, &c., but the final reason for His rejection is to be found in those laws of truth and love and purity which regulate His kingdom, and which are bright as gold and soft as silk to the righteous, but

which are to the disobedient and lawless hateful as the hangman's noose.

IV. The **vanity** of this opposition to Christ.

1. The *unreasonableness* of it. It is vain in the sense of being unreasonable. "Why do the heathen rage?" This is a question to which no satisfactory answer can be given. Christ is the most blessed King, and wherever He reigns blessings abound. Why reject Him? It is a vain, foolish act. To all His enemies we ask, "What evil hath He done?" Statesmen are against Him, and yet they cannot shut their eyes to the fact that His religion makes grand nations; philosophers are against Him, and yet they cannot deny but that He has lit up the intellectual sphere with a most precious and benign light; moralists are against Him, and yet they confess His character to be unique and unapproachable in its sublime beauty and goodness. All sinners are against Him; and yet in their deepest heart they know Him to be love, His law to be right, His kingdom to be the kingdom of heaven. To oppose Christ is madness, blind passion, suicidal folly, for He is the sinner's friend, the Desire of the nations.

2. The *uselessness* of it. It is "vain" in the sense of being useless. The physical man might sooner hope to free himself from the law of gravitation, than the man moral expect to shake himself loose from the law and dominion of Christ. It is God's declared will that Christ shall reign, and that all things shall be put under His feet (ver. 7, 8). "The day of Christ's coronation was the day of His resurrection."—*Peronne*. (Ver. 7.) By virtue of His atoning work He has become the King of kings, and He shall reign for ever and ever (Dan. vii. 9-14). God holds in contempt the enemies of His Son (ver. 4). "With the rage and exertion of His enemies the poet sets in beautiful contrast the laughing quiet of his God, who can with one word bring these proceedings to naught."—*De Wette*. And all the rage of the unbelieving fails to destroy Messiah's kingdom. "The ungodly storm and rage against the pious, excite all their counsels against them. But all

this is as the stormy, swollen waves of the sea, which rush along as if they would break down the shore, but before they reach the shore they quiet down again, vanish in themselves, or break up with a little foam upon the shore."—*Luther*. "The Church is oppressed but not suppressed."—*Moll*. And God shall at length cover all Christ's enemies with confusion and ruin (ver. 9). "He shall break them," &c. Is not the Jewish nation a signal illustration of this? Nations and men who set themselves against Christ perish. We see here then the utter vanity of all attempts to injure the throne of God's Anointed King,—Messiah.

The Psalmist concludes:

1. With an *admonition*. "Be wise now," &c. (ver. 10.) "*Be wise*." Let the princes exalt Christ in their kingdoms, in their hearts; let all know the folly and fruitlessness of resisting Him. One of the Roman philosophers remarked to the Emperor Adrian, "I never dispute with a prince who has twenty-four legions in his service." "All power is given unto Christ," and this power is based on love and righteousness, and woe unto those who resist the Saviour-King. When His wrath blazes forth they "perish from the way" (ver. 12). "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. xxi. 44). "It shall grind him to powder," meant a destruction utter, and hopeless, and everlasting, and without remedy. Ground—ground to powder! Any life left in that? any gathering up of that, and making a man of it again? All the humanity battered out of it, and the life clean gone from it? Does not that sound very much like everlasting destruction "from the presence of God and from the glory of His power"! Christ, silent now, will begin to speak; passive now, will begin to act. The stone comes down, and the fall of it will be awful! "I remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where, beneath a tall black cliff, all weather-worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at the foot, resting on the green—

sword that creeps round its base, a huge rock that has fallen from the face of the precipice. A shepherd was passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle—and it fell; and the man that was beneath it is there now! 'Ground to powder.' Ah, my brethren! that is not *my* illustration—that is Christ's. Therefore I say to *you*, since all that stand against Him shall become as 'the chaff of the summer threshing-floor,' and be swept utterly away, make Him the foundation on which you build; and when the storm sweeps away every 'refuge of lies,' you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of Ages."—*Maclaren*. "Be wise *now*." Fools do that at last which wise men do at first.

2. With a *direction*. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (ver. 11). With *fear*, because of His greatness and holiness; with *joy*, because His law is love, and His service freedom.

3. With a *persuasion*. "Kiss the Son," &c. (ver. 12.) "Do Him homage." His wrath may kindle suddenly, and if it does, we "perish from the *right way*."—*Prayer-Book*. "The power of Christ will be manifested in all, by the destruction either of sin or the sinner."—*Horne*. "Blessed are all they," &c. "Only those who reject the breath of love, feel the iron of justice."—*Moll*.

Let Him break the law of sin with a rod of iron, let Him dash to pieces our bad heart as a potter's vessel, but let us put our trust in Him, and He shall save our souls alive.

THE REIGN OF CHRIST.

(Verses 6-12.)

We have here a description of Christ's mediatorial reign.

Observe :

I. Its sovereignty.

Ver. 6. Christ is here exalted above all kings and nations. His throne is set above all earthly thrones; on His head are many crowns. The supreme power is in the hands of the Messiah.

II. Its authority.

Ver. 7. "I will declare what God has decreed."—*Horsley*. "The kings of Israel derived their authority from God; they were appointed to execute His laws; and being God's vicegerents, they were in their official capacity styled *gods*, or sons of God."—*Phillips*. So is Christ's administration of Divine authority, but in a peculiar and pre-eminent sense. He is not a son of God, but *the* Son of God. And Christ was not *made* the Son of God in the incarnation or in the resurrection, but He was in those great events

manifested as such. "He *was made* of the seed of David according to the flesh; and *declared to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom i. 3, 4).

Christ is of Divine *nature*; His redeeming work was Divine *work*; and His mediatorial reign is of Divine *authority* and *force*.

III. Its universality.

Ver. 8. "His kingdom ruleth over all," and aims to restore all.

IV. Its irresistibility.

Ver. 9. "The enemies of Christ suppose that His sceptre is still a reed, as in the time of His sufferings; but they will be obliged to experience, some day, to their greatest shame, the iron sceptre in His hand."—*Moll*.

V. Its graciousness.

Ver. 10, &c. Its grand design is to save and bless.

ANTAGONISTIC FORCES.

(Verse 11.)

"Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

The scientist tells us that the laws of nature are arranged on the principle of antagonistic forces; and it is somewhat thus with the laws of the Christian life.

I. We describe the two states of feeling to which the text refers.

1. "Serve the Lord with *fear*." There are two kinds of fear—servile and filial. The latter is indicated here. A noble sensitiveness, an anxious conscientiousness, a salutary apprehensiveness. "With trembling." "With diffidence. The thing meant is that sort of fear which arises from a man's diffidence of his own strength and power."—*Horsley*.
2. "And *rejoice*." Be glad in the Lord, and in His service. "Take satisfaction, joy, and glory to yourselves in becoming His servants. But let it be a holy, temperate joy, fearful of offence, not heedless and presumptuous, verging on the licentious kind."—*Horsley*. We observe:

II. These two states of feeling are not incompatible.

Fear and joy are only apparently contradictory. We often see in nature how apparently contradictory materials and forces blend. Oxygen and nitrogen may be spoken of as contradictory gases, but they are really complementary, and, combined in due proportions, make the sweet and vital atmosphere. Attraction and repulsion seem to be contradictory forces, but are really complementary, and their combined action preserves the universe in harmonic movement. Forces, laws, phenomena, which appear contradictory are really complementary, and from their combined action spring the glories and melodies of creation. Thus is it in Christian experience. States of feeling which are apparently contradictory are really correlative. Joy and sorrow, weakness and strength, fear and comfort; these different states of feeling are often co-existent in the Christian heart.

III. These two states of feeling are essential to the security and development of the Christian life.

They not only *may*, but they *ought* to exist together.

We ought to *fear*. Some Christians are distressed because they feel this emotion. They need not. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The brighter the star the more it trembles. As the needle trembles to the pole, so should our soul tremble to its God.

We ought to *rejoice*. Pliny tells us of some strange tribes who dwelt in caves because they were afraid of the sunshine; we have known Christians similarly afraid of sunshine. Be not afraid of joy. Let Him lead you into green pastures. "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice." "There must ever be a holy fear mixed with the Christian's joy. This is a sacred compound, yielding a sweet smell; and we must see to it that we burn no other upon the altar. Fear without joy is torment; and joy without holy fear would be presumption."—*Spurgeon*.

There must be the two states of feeling, and they must be duly *balanced*. If we give too much place to fear, it destroys the freedom, nobility, and joyfulness of the soul; if we give too much place to joy, it renders the soul relaxed and light.

And these two states of feeling, completing and balancing each other, secure the *true development and perfection of the soul*. The laws of nature are arranged on the principle of antagonistic forces, and the constant struggle to maintain the equilibrium fills creation with motion, life, music, beauty, and fruitfulness. So weakness and strength, joy and sorrow, solicitude and comfort, hope and fear, are the antagonistic forces of the soul, and in the constant struggle to secure the equilibrium, the moral nature is being exercised, enlarged, and perfected.

PSALM III.

MINORITIES AND MAJORITIES.

Introduction.

"The preceding psalm had set before us the utter vanity of all attempts to injure the throne of God's anointed King—Messiah. The present psalm relates to that incident in David's life which stands as the typical instance of rebellion against God's kingdom ;—as the type, therefore, of the working of Antichrist."—*Kay*.

I. The majority without God.

1. The *greatness* of the majority. "How are they increased." "Many are they" (ver. 1). "Many there be" (ver. 2). "Ten thousands of people, that have set themselves" (ver. 6). Nearly all Israel had deserted the king (2 Sam. xv. 12). How often has goodness to find itself outvoted ! How often has the man of God to feel a sense of solitude and desolation ! Thus Christ. Thus the Church has often been outnumbered by its enemies, again and again. A few holy men have had to struggle against the weight of governments, the influence of the press, the omnipotence of wealth, the organisation of parties, the fury of mobs, and sometimes the power of the pulpit. And the believer feels the air is full of foes : his adversaries are "legion." He feels that he is alone contending with dark hosts of sins, doubts, fears, and sorrows. "They set themselves round about." They swarm on every hand, and fix themselves in battle array. The odds were overwhelmingly against the Psalmist ; so are the odds overwhelmingly against the Church of Christ, and against the souls which trust in Christ.

2. The *bitterness* of the majority. "Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God" (ver. 2). "He has offended God : and God, who was his strength, has forsaken him. God will no longer save him. He is a reprobate."—*Kay*. "God as well as man is against him ; his destruction is certain ; prayer itself will be of no avail."—*Perowne* (2 Sam. xvi. 8). His enemies breathe out cruelty. "The words of the adversaries pronounce a judgment upon his inmost life, or upon his personal relationship to God."—*Delitzsch*. "God," they cried, "has deserted him."

And the Psalmist knew that their reproach was not without seeming justification. He knew that his own sin lay at the bottom of this insurrection. "David had plunged himself into the deepest abyss of wretchedness by his adultery with Bathsheba. The rebellion of Absalom belonged to the series of dire calamities which began to come upon him from that time. Plausible reasons were not wanting for such words as these which gave up his cause as lost."—*Delitzsch*. Thus his enemies, as well as his disconcerted friends, remember his sin, and regard him as one cast away. And this was the weak point of David in dealing with the hosts of the enemy. And it is with us. A sense of moral blamelessness would enable us to confront boldly with the seraph Abdiel a myriad enemies ; but "conscience makes cowards of us all," and we tremble in the presence of numbers. Thus our spiritual adversaries reproach us ; *there is no salvation for him in God* ; and the consciousness of our faithlessness gives a power and sting to their words which penetrate our soul with bitterness, and which might well drive us to despair.

II. The minority with God.

The Psalmist felt himself to be in a minority of one, but *with God*. Mark :

1. His *consciousness of safety* (ver. 3). "A shield about me, or around me, covering the whole body ; not merely a part of it, as ordinary shields do."—*Alexander*. Alone with God the believer feels profoundly safe. "If God be for us," &c.

2. His *refuge in prayer* (ver. 4). The Lord heard his cry of penitence and supplication. It was in this cry that the guilty, lonely man put himself right with God. He is away from the sanctuary, away from the ark ; but the voice

of the solitary and sorrowful reaches God anywhere. Alone with God, this is the secret of the martyr's strength. If the world forsakes you, if men and demons mock you, knock at Heaven's gate with cries, and groans, and tears, and God shall receive and shelter you.

His *sublime peacefulness* (ver. 5, 6). "*I laid me down and slept,*" &c. Many lie down who cannot sleep, but he could lie down on a rough bed and sleep. God's hand was his pillow, and his sleep was sweet. The peace of God passeth understanding, and the wildest storms of temptation and persecution cannot disturb it. The Atlantic Ocean is swept by fearful storms, and mountainous billows traverse its surface, but scientific men say it is so quiet down in the depths that if you could stretch a rope of sand from one side of the ocean to the other, there is not disturbance enough to dissolve it. So amid the direst storms of life the believer's heart is kept in perfect peace, a peace which the world gives not, and which the world does not take away.

4. His *assurance of victory* (ver. 7). He looks upon victory as certain, as indeed already accomplished. He sees his enemy "as a wild beast whose jaw is broken, and which is unable to devour its prey."—*Kay*. He feels assured that God will rebuke the wrath of Shimei, confound the counsel of Ahithophel, frustrate the usurpation of Absalom, and bring to nought the uprising of Israel. So, having put ourselves right with God, although our enemies rage as the waves of the sea, we may confidently anticipate victory.

5. His *generous temper* (ver. 8). He

does not ask for vengeance, but blessing. This verse "casts a bright light into the very depths of his noble soul."—*Ewald*. He has been wronged; but as God has forgiven him, so he forgives those who have injured him. Too often when minorities become majorities they exact and tyrannise; but when God exalts us in the gate, our spirit should be forgiving and tender.

Lessons:

1. Do not always trust in the verdicts of majorities. "The longest sword, the strongest lungs, the most voices, are false measures of truth."—*Whichcote*.

2. Do not confide in majorities. David was at one time most popular; but how soon the people deserted him. "Mortality is but the stage of mutability."—*Trapp*.

3. Do not fear to be in a minority with God. "Everybody," said Talleyrand, "is cleverer than anybody." This is fine worldly wisdom no doubt, but God is wiser, stronger than all, and he who is in a minority with God need not fear. "He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world."

4. Remember that the majority will be against you when God is. When the people thought that God had forsaken the king, they forsook him too. Men often sell their conscience for a majority, but know when God forsakes you, the universe forsakes you.

5. The way to conquer majorities is through penitence and prayer. Thus, in great social and religious reforms, Luther, Wilberforce. So in our spiritual life; "One shall chase a thousand," &c. And thus shall the majority against the Christian Church be changed into a minority.

MISTAKEN VERDICTS.

(Verses 2, 3.)

In the second verse you have the verdict of *sense* touching the Psalmist's character; in the third verse you have the judgment of *faith*.

I. The verdict of *sense*.

Ver. 2. The verdict of sense was that the king was deserted of God. And observe:

1. This verdict was *popular*. "*Many there be,*" &c. It appeared thus to his enemies, and it would seem as if many of his friends shared the same opinion. It was the verdict of the multitude.

2. It was *plausible*. It regarded the king's *sin*. The devil's advocates would not fail to keep the dark crime of the

fallen king before the eyes of the nation. Would not God forsake such a sinner? And then there were the *circumstances* of the king. He appears fallen and discrowned. Driven away from his palace, and accompanied in exile by a few trembling friends. 'Surely God had deserted the royal sinner,' they said.

3. It was *confident*. "There is *no help*," &c. They felt sure that his cause was utterly hopeless: God had cut him off altogether.

II. The judgment of faith.

Ver. 3. The voice of the people was *not* the voice of God. The Psalmist puts his personal consciousness over against the anathemas of the people. He knows God to be his shield, his glory, and the restorer of his fortunes.

How often has this fact been repeated! The verdict of men passed upon their brother is one of capital condemnation, and yet the condemned one has hope in God. How often does the *world* speak thus:—"The chief of sinners amongst men," 'the woman that is a sinner.' How soon society regards these as lost, hopeless! How often has a *corrupt Church* spoken thus! The Catholics kindled the stake, and consigned the souls of glorious saints to the devil. Nay, is not the *true Church* of Christ sometimes in danger of falling into this mistake? Are we not ready to give up some cases, some classes, perhaps, as impracticable? How is it that we fall into this great mistake?

1. We take *circumstances* as the sign of a man's spiritual status and relationship. The people did in Jerusalem; we do, and it is a great error. A man may be poor, friendless, afflicted, reduced to

saddest straits, and yet not be forsaken of God.

2. We ignore the *power of penitence*. Ver. 4. The Psalmist "cried unto the Lord," &c. The world knows a man's sins, when it does not know his deep sorrow and burning tears.

3. We limit the *mercy and grace of God*. God's pity is greater than ours, and the blood of Jesus makes the foulest clean. "No help for him in God." Some sinners are so obtuse, defiant, brutal, their wickedness so profound, and chronic, and desperate, that we practically despair of their salvation. Yet, have not our brightest saints been raised out of most abandoned and desperate sinners? The natural historian tells us that the rich olive was once dry and offensive, the luscious peach bitter, the apple-tree full of thorns, the aromatic rose a mere thorn, and the fields of wavy gold but wild grasses. But far more surprising transformations have been wrought in the Church of God. "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor unchaste, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor. vi. 9-11). We forget the greatness of redeeming mercy and power.

Lessons:

1. *Human judgments are not infallible.*

2. *Despair not of the worst of men.*

3. *Despair not of yourselves in life's darkest moments.*

PSALM IV.

NIGHT THOUGHTS.

Introduction.

"The Psalmist prays God to deliver him from present as from past distresses (ver. 2). 1. He assures the haters of his regal dignity that God bestowed it, and will certainly protect it (ver. 3, 4). 2, 3. He exhorts them to quiet submission, righteousness, and trust in God (ver. 5, 6). 4, 5. He contrasts his own satisfaction, springing from such trust, with the hopeless disquietude of others, even in the midst of their enjoyments (ver. 7, 8). 6, 7. He closes with an exquisite proof of his tranquillity by falling asleep, as it were, before us, under the Divine protection (ver. 9). 8. The third psalm may be described as a morning, and this fourth as an evening psalm."—*Alexander*.

MAN APPEALING TO GOD.

(Verse 1.)

In the midst of trials and perils the Psalmist seeketh audience with God.

Observe :

He *first* appeals to God. He does not go to God when all human inventions have been tried and failed, but his first cry is to Heaven. It is a good thing to take life's questions to Him "straightway." Before you go to the doctor, go to God ; before you go to the lawyer, go to God ; before you go to your friend, to your minister, go to God. Go directly from your trouble, with your trouble, to God. We often suffer loss by keeping back our burdens. Consult Heaven at first, and you will feel after that that you have little to ask from human counsellors and comforters.

I. He appeals to the Divine righteousness.

"O God of my righteousness." He recognises the *fact of God's* righteousness. Man is unjust, the world often seems to be full of injustice ; but David recognises the justice of the Divine character and government. And not only so, but he recognises *his personal relation* to the righteous God. "O God of *my* righteousness." "O God ! who art righteous Thyself, and art the patron of my righteousness, of my righteous cause, and of my righteous life." —*Leighton*. The Psalmist claims to be righteous, but acknowledges God as the author of his righteousness. "A celebrated heathen said, 'I wrap myself up in my own virtue.' A true believer has something infinitely better to wrap himself in. When Satan says, Thou hast yielded to my suggestions ; when Conscience says, Thou hast turned a deaf ear to my admonitions ; when the Law of God says, Thou has broken me ; when the Gospel says, Thou hast neglected me ; when Justice says, Thou hast insulted me ; when Mercy says, Thou hast slighted me ; Faith can say, All this is too true ! but I wrap myself up in the righteousness of Jesus Christ." —*Toplady*. God cannot hear our appeal except we recognise His righteousness,

and except through His grace we are righteous ourselves.

II. He appeals to the Divine faithfulness.

"Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." The Psalmist had truly a *good memory*. He did not forget God's help and mercies in days past ; his memory was full of sun-pictures ; and with faultless logic he inferred that still God would deliver him. Our memory is often bad, and we forget God's mercies ; our reasoning is often bad, and we argue from past deliverances to future desertions and disasters. May God mend our memories and our logic ! In the day of trouble and persecution, remember how God has ever stood by His people, and remember that His faithfulness faileth not.

III. He appeals to the Divine mercy.

"Have mercy upon me." However just we may feel our cause to be, we have always need to feel how much there is about us which needs to be forgiven, and that we must crave help on the ground of mercy, not demand it in the name of justice.

Observe :

1. The *blessedness* of appealing to God. How grand it is thus to open the heart to God in dark and trying days ! "The life of man upon earth is a warfare ; and it is much better, in the midst of enemies and dangers, to be acquainted with one fortress than with many inns. He that knows how to pray may be pressed, but cannot be overwhelmed." —*Leighton*. "Hear me *when I call*." In the very hour and article of trouble. The other day there was a great storm, and the electric wires were all broken, and messages could not be transmitted ; but the direst storms interrupt not our intercourse with Heaven ; nay, then the lines of communication act best, and we no sooner cry than He answers.

Observe :

2. The *conditions* of appealing to God. It is the prerogative only of the just and

believing man. We must remember the rectitude of God's nature and rule. "David asks nothing inconsistent with God's holiness, and the same rule should govern all our prayers."—*Alexander*. And we must live in a right relation to the just and gracious God. "Right-

eousness and grace are not opposed to one another in God, but man must not forget that he must enter into *positive* and *active* relations with reference to *both* of these attributes of God, if he would obtain and retain righteousness, peace, and joy."—*Moll*.

EXPOSTULATION.

(Verses 2-6.)

The Psalmist here addresses his enemies.

I. He reminds them of the vanity of their opposition to himself.

Ver. 2. "How long will ye turn my glory into shame?"—*i.e.*, my personal and official honour and character. "How long will ye utter slanders against me, and trail my honour in the dust?"—*Delitzsch*. The Psalmist declares their conduct to be vain, their hostility to be fruitless.

(1.) Because he was Divinely *elected*. Ver. 3. "How long will ye deem lightly of my Divine election, which is the sole cause of my occupying so high a dignity."—*Kay*. He felt that God had chosen him, and had not rejected him.

(2.) Because he was Divinely *protected*. "The Lord will hear when I call unto Him" (ver. 3). He is still my glory and refuge.

1. *There is warning here for the enemies of Christ*. David was a type of the Messiah; and *Horne* well observes: "If the Israelitish monarch conceived he had just cause to expostulate with his enemies for despising the royal majesty with which Jehovah had invested His anointed, of how much severer reproof shall they be thought worthy who blaspheme the essential 'glory' of King Messiah, which shines forth by his Gospel in the Church? Thou, O Christ, art everlasting truth; all is 'vanity and falsehood,' transient and fallacious, but the love of Thee!" God hath set forth Jesus Christ; He hears Him always; and he who contends against the Lord Jesus fights against God. How vain such a rebellion!

2. *There is comfort here for the disciples of Christ*. The "word here used,

'godly,' commonly denotes one who loves God."—*Kay*. And there is great comfort here for the lovers of God. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself." God knows those who fear Him; He prizes them; He watches over them with loving jealousy. "What rare persons the godly are! 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour' (Prov. xii. 26). As the flower of the sun, as the wine of Lebanon, as the sparkling upon Aaron's breastplate, such is the orient splendour of a person embellished with godliness. . . . The godly are precious, therefore they are set apart for God. We set apart things that are precious; the godly are set apart as God's peculiar treasure (Ps. cxxxv. 4); as His garden of delight (Cant. iv. 12); as His royal diadem (Isa. xliii. 3); the godly are the excellent of the earth (Ps. xvi. 3); comparable to fine gold (Lam. iv. 2); double refined (Zech. xiii. 9). They are the glory of the creation (Isa. xlvi. 13). Origen compares the saints to sapphires and crystals. God calls them jewels (Mal. iii. 17)."—*Thomas Watson, quoted by Spurgeon*. And God will preserve His jewels. We often read now-a-days of great 'jewel-robberies;' but if we will be faithful to God, "none shall pluck us out of His hand." In the second place the Psalmist

II. Exhorts his enemies to repentance and amity.

Ver. 4, 5. Here the Psalmist rises to a great height. He has forgotten himself and his apparent peril, and is solicitous only about his enemies. He is anxious, but it is on *their* account; *they* are in the greatest danger who are

found fighting against God. Sublimely self-forgetful, he admonishes his adversaries. "He passes on to wise and loving counsels."—*Perowne*.

1. He exhorts them to *solemn reflection*. Ver. 4. "In your secret chambers." "Let the still hours of the night bring calmer and wiser thoughts with them."—*Perowne*. It is a good thing to talk with ourselves in the silence of the soul, in the secrecy of our chambers. "Unless a man takes himself sometimes out of the world by retirement and self-reflection, he will be in danger of losing himself in the world."—*Whichcote*. And as *Trapp* quaintly says: "As it is a sign that there are great distempers in that family where husband and wife go divers

days together and speak not the one to the other, so in that soul that flieth from itself, and can go long without self-examination."

2. He exhorts them to *practical piety*. Ver. 5. "Sacrifices accompanied by uprightness of intention and innocency of life."—*Kay*. "Fruits meet for repentance." All sacrifices wanting in sincerity and righteousness are but provocations of God.

It is the duty of all Christian people thus to expostulate earnestly and affectionately with the enemies of Christ. Oh! that the enemies of the Church of God would listen to His heralds, improve the truce of God, and lay down the weapons of rebellion.

THE CHIEF GOOD.

(Verses 6-8.)

I. The grand question.

"Who shall show us any good?" (ver. 6). 1. It is the *universal* question. "There be many that say," &c. Men of all ranks, gifts, ages, are thus crying. There is within them a strange void, a great discontent; they want something which they have not. 2. It is a *passionate, imperative* question. "Who shall?" Who can? With what restless avidity men seek to find the grand remedy for their profound discontent! 3. Is it not a *despairing* question? "Who shall?" as if in mockery. There is no such thing, seems to be implied.

"Arts, superstition, arms, philosophy.

Have each in turn possessed, betrayed, and mocked us;"

and men lose faith in the chief good, and cynically ask, Who shall declare it? As in Noel Paton's great picture, the vast multitude is pursuing a shadowy shape, which seems to promise them ineffable satisfaction, but which ever eludes their eager grasp.

II. The true answer.

"Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us" (ver. 6).

There is a true answer to this question, and here we have it. The smile of God is the essential good. Mark:

1. The *spirituality* of the supreme blessing.

Here the world errs in imagining the chief good to be natural, sensible. "Who shall show us any good?" "Through all their life, with an unstable pace, they catch at flying forms of good; and after all their falls and their bruises, they cry out again and again, *Who will show us any good?* And when they behold any new species or shadow of it, they immediately run to it."—*Leighton*. In opposition to this, the Psalmist avers that the supreme blessing is the light of God's countenance. Observe:

(1.) *Natural things will not atone for the absence of God*. Nothing will take the place of God. Chemistry alleges that it has discovered a means of producing artificial sunlight. From natural elements a flame is to be evolved which shall equal in quality and intensity the light emitted from the sun. Wonderful things, no doubt, have come from the brains of chemists, but it will be a long time, nevertheless, before they make us independent of the sun. It will be a long time before "artificial sunshine" melts the snows of winter, paints the flowers of summer, ripens the fruits of autumn, shoots life through the swelling year. So we may try to find in natural things substitutes for the light of God's face, but they must all prove in vain. Oh! cease your vain attempts to create

light and joy out of merely worldly elements; look up, and in the light of God's countenance find the vital sunshine of the soul.

"Mark what is good in the creatures you behold, in the song of birds, in the beauty of flowers, in the wealth of metals, in the sweetness of meats; these are but rills proceeding from God, the abounding Fount; all these utter the things which are in God; for all creatures are but voices manifesting Him. Yet we must not rest in them. It has happened that painters have pictured fruit with such accuracy, that birds have come out of the sky, thinking them real, in order to feed upon them; but finding them to be painted, and that there is no food in them, they fly away to seek their true sustenance. The Divine painter has traced with His brush in His creatures the beauties which live in Himself, and in them they seem to live. Yet are they but figures, not verities, *for the fashion of this world passeth away*. Would you know how to act, knowing that these are but pictures and not realities? Act as the bird, which, finding no food in the painting, seeks its real meat elsewhere. Mark this, you will find in creation no true food, no satiety, no repose; mark this and fly away to your God. He is very good, He is true food, in Him alone is repose."—*John Osorius*, 1558.

(2.) *The blessing of God is the sweetness of all natural things*. So far from natural things atoning for the absence of God, they have no power to satisfy except by virtue of the Divine blessing. "As with manna there fell a dew, so to a good soul, together with corn and wine there is a secret influence of God, which the carnal heart is not acquainted with."—*Trapp*.

(3.) *The blessing of God is enough in the absence of all natural gifts and ecclesiastical privileges*. Without natural gifts. He can satisfy the soul directly without the corn and wine at all. "He is enough without the creature, but the creature is not anything without Him. It is, therefore, better to enjoy Him without anything else, than to enjoy everything else without Him. It is

better to be a wooden vessel filled with wine than a golden one filled with water."—*Secker, quoted by Spurgeon*. Without ecclesiastical agencies. David was at a distance from the tabernacle, and he had sent back the ark to Jerusalem, but he felt that God put joy into his heart all the same. He and his friends rejoice, although cut off from the Tabernacle, to feel God near and precious. "We cannot now, it is true, offer the sacrifices of victims before the ark at Jerusalem, but we may offer the sacrifice of the spirit. We have not access to the Urim and Thummim, on the high priest's breastplate in the sanctuary; but God will lift up the light of His countenance upon us. That is the true Urim and Thummim. We cannot now receive the benediction of the priests, 'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;' but the Lord Himself is ever present with us to bless us, and He lifts up the light of His countenance upon us. There is our true good. There is our genuine gladness."—*Wordsworth*. So, if God take away from us material good, and deprive us, or permit us to be deprived, of ecclesiastical ceremonies and services, He can come into our soul and fill it with sublime delights. Ah! God sometimes takes away proprieties and ceremonies that we may realise more richly and fully the spiritual blessedness which those agents sometimes veil and limit.

2. *The sufficiency of the supreme blessing*. "More than in the time," &c. (ver. 7). "David's enemies have at their command all earthly means of support and enjoyment. He finds it difficult to collect supplies for himself and his army, yet God has given him a better joy than that of harvest or vintage."—*Perowne*. "The joy of godliness is infinitely greater than that of worldliness. There is as much difference between heavenly comforts and earthly, as between a banquet that is eaten and one that is painted on the wall."—*Watson, quoted by Spurgeon*. The delight of the saint is—

"What nothing earthly gives or can destroy,
The soul's calm sunshine and the heart-felt
joy."—*Pope*.

3. The *fruits* of this blessing :

(1.) The consciousness of *peace*. "I will both lay me down and sleep" (ver. 8). "At once, as soon as I lie down, I sleep, not harassed by disturbing and anxious thoughts."—*Phillips*. In the drama the sleepless king wonders that sleep—

"Upon the high and giddy mast
Seals up the ship-boy's eyes, and rocks his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge ;
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,

Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deaf'ning clamours in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes.
Canst thou, O partial sleep! give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude?"

But in those storms of life which are stronger, wilder than fiercest sea-storm, "God giveth His beloved sleep."

(2.) The consciousness of *safety*. To "dwell in safety." "He needs no guards, for he is guarded round about by Jehovah, and kept in safety."—*Delitzsch*.

PSALM V.

INTRODUCTION.

"A morning prayer of David, appealing to God as his king, against whose sovereignty his own enemies were really in rebellion."—*Kay*. "This psalm must have been composed at Jerusalem, since David had access to the house of God (see ver. 7) ; probably a short time before the open revolt of Absalom, when the king was aware of the machinations of conspirators under a bloodthirsty and treacherous chief (ver. 6). Like Psalm iii., it is a morning song (ver. 6)." —*Speaker's Commentary*.

MORNING PRAYER.

(Verses 1-4.)

We are taught here some great truths concerning prayer.

I. True prayer is **personal**.

"My words," "My meditation," "My cry," "My King," "My God." David was a king, yet was he his own chaplain. We must pray for ourselves. A parent's prayer, a minister's prayer, will not do for us. No one can become deputy for us before the throne of grace. And in prayer we must realise our personal relation to God. He is "My Father," "My King," "My God."

II. True prayer is **profound and passionate**.

1. It begins with *words*. "Give ear to my words." Many have an idea that words are not necessary to prayer, that the finest prayer does without words. When Curran asked Grattan if he ever prayed; "No," said Grattan, "but I have aspirations all the day long." There is a subtle danger here. True prayer cannot indeed fully express itself, but it will labour to do so. If our sense of need is real and intense,

we shall speak out in broken, burning words. Robert Hall, in his private devotions prayed aloud, lest his prayers should become vapid and wandering. If there is no audible, verbal prayer, the "aspirations" will become ever more shadowy and vague. "None of God's children are possessed with a dumb devil."—*Spurgeon*.

2. True prayer deepens into *sighs*. "O Lord, consider my sighs." "Understand my sighing."—*Horsley*. "Meditation—moanings of that half-uttered form to which deep feeling gives rise—groanings," as Rom. viii. 26, 27.—*Jamieson*. If language could express all we feel, ours could hardly be a true prayer; language breaks off into groanings.

3. True prayer rises into *cries*. "Hearken unto the voice of my cry." It rises into a cry, and a cry has a voice which pierces heaven. Prevailing prayer comes from the profound of the bosom, and is heard in the high places of the firmament.

III. True prayer is resolute.

"For unto Thee will I pray." "There is a holy boldness here. God, as the King of His people, could not deny them His protection, and they asked no other. *For to Thee, and Thee only, will I pray.* As if he had said, it is in this capacity that I invoke Thee, and I therefore must be heard."—*Alexander.*

IV. True prayer is obedient.

Ver. 3. "In the morning will I set in order for Thee, and will look out."—*Kay.* David speaks of himself, figuratively, as a ministering priest, setting in order the altar wood and the morning sacrifice. Now the Levite acted according to the law of God in presenting the sacrifices, and they were accepted only as they were so offered. In prayer we must recognise the word and will of God. Prayer is not, as some suppose, a wild, arbitrary, lawless overriding of Divine law; but, on the contrary, it profoundly consults the mind of God; it

regulates its petitions by the revealed will of God, and seeks to conform all life to the purpose and plan of God.

V. True prayer is expectant.

"And will look up," or look out. "Look out expectantly for the thing prayed for."—*Kay.* *Alexander* says: "The image presented is that of one looking from a wall or tower in anxious expectation of approaching succour." *Horsley* says: "I will watch for Thee—i.e., watch for some usual signal of God's favour, some appearance in the flame of the sacrifice, or a ray of the Shekinah issuing from the sanctuary." Let us look for answers to our prayers. When a man has lodged his prayers with God he may look up, he ought to look up, and God will not disappoint him.

Let us then each morning thus draw nigh unto God. We cannot tell what a day shall bring forth, but if we greet the morning sun with prayer, we shall see the setting sun with praise.

THE RELATION OF GOD TO THE WICKED.

(Verses 4-6.)

It is a relationship of direct and passionate antagonism. Observe the gradations of the text.

I. God has no pleasure in wickedness.

Ver. 4. The Psalmist seems to say, There are such gods in other nations, gods delighting in blood and lust; but *Thou* dost not delight in iniquity. The gods of Greece and Rome found pleasure in licentiousness; but, however Christianity may be a 'civilised heathenism,' it sets before us Deity in another light than that.

More:

II. God does not tolerate wickedness.

"Neither shall evil dwell with Thee." Many would teach us that God does tolerate evil—that He employs it to perfect man, to develop the universe. No; He cannot dwell with it, cannot tolerate it. Remember this in the Church. History relates that Redwald, King of East Anglia, built a church, at one end of which was an

altar for the sacrifice of the mass, and at the other end an altar for sacrifice to the old British idols. How frequently the Church is in danger of making analogous compromises, allowing certain evils to exist within its borders for the sake of gold, or popularity, or peace. It must not be, or God will not dwell with us. And we must remember this in our *personal* life. "Rest assured, Christ will not live in the parlour of our hearts if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts."—*Spurgeon.* God does not tolerate wickedness. It is no part of His pleasure, no part of His policy, that evil should be found in the human heart or in the world.

III. God hates wickedness.

"Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity" (ver. 5, 6). "The Lord abhors the wicked." He "will destroy them." It is unspeakably repugnant to Him. "God perfectly hateth wickedness and wicked persons. God hateth sin worse than He doth the devil; for He

hateth the devil for sin's sake, and not sin for the devil's sake."—*Trapp*.

We see here the condemnation of whatever speaks lightly or tolerantly of sin. Of the *philosophy* which does—the philosophy which pleads for evil as necessary to effect God's purposes; as one of our poets speaks of the devil—

"Existing for some good,
By us not understood."

Of the *morality* which does—the morality which regards sin as an incon-

venience or impolicy, rather than as damnable in its essence. Of the *Christianity* which does—Antinomianism; Roman Catholicism, with its division of sin into venial and mortal; and that general Christian experience which has no burning hatred to evil.

In our personal life, in the Church, in all departments of worldly action, we must look upon foulness with horror, or with horror God will look upon us. "Ye that love the Lord hate evil."

THE RELATION OF GOD TO THE SAINTS.

(Verses 7-12.)

"Throughout the psalm there breathes a strong feeling that God is pledged by His very character as a righteous God to defend and bless the righteous."—*Perowne*.

I. God is their Shepherd.

"Lead me, O Lord," &c. As a shepherd leads his flock. "Make *Thy way* straight," &c. "Do not let me choose *my own way*, but Thine; and do Thou make *Thy way* level and manifest before me."—*Wordsworth*. Is God your Shepherd? Are you following obediently in His way? Then you need fear no pit or wolf.

II. God is their Shield.

In the 12th verse the Psalmist recognises that God is a shield. In the 9th and 10th verses we see the greatness of the Psalmist's peril. His enemies are profoundly *depraved*. "Their inward part is an abyss." They are altogether corrupt. And yet his enemies are most *plausible*. "They flatter with their tongue." "I have my doubts whether 'flattery' be the thing meant by the Hebrew words. Is it not rather that the persons in question, by plausible arguments and an ensnaring eloquence, contrived to set a fair appearance upon mischievous maxims and pernicious practices? Libertines, in all ages, have not wanted excuses for their riot and

debaucheries. The idolaters of antiquity contrived to give an air of mysterious sanctity to the idlest fables and the foulest rites; and the philosophical atheists of modern times throw an air of wisdom over the most absurd doctrines and the most wicked principles. Thus the words of the wicked are fair while their practices are abominable, and they promise well with the worst intentions."—*Horsley*. The enemies of the Psalmist were vicious and guileful, and he felt the need and blessedness of God's shield. So the opposition which the saints have to overcome is similar to that encountered by David. *Corrupt* and *plausible*—such is the world, such the devil, such the flesh. God is our Shield, let us press close to its shelter!

III. God is their Song.

Ver. 11, 12. Enemies throng, but the saints can sing.

1. It is the privilege of the saint to rejoice. "Rejoice." "Shout for joy." "Be joyful in Thee."

2. It is the privilege of *all* saints thus to rejoice. "Let *all* those who trust in Thee rejoice."

3. It is their blessed privilege *always* to rejoice. "Let them *ever* shout for joy."

PSALM VI.

INTRODUCTION.

"The first of the seven Penitential Psalms. It has been said that there is much of grief in it, but nothing of penitence. This, however, is an error. The tears shed by David over Absalom (2 Sam. xviii. 33) came, we are sure, from the fountain of a penitent heart. He knew well that Absalom's rebellion was permitted by God as a penal consequence of his sin."—*Kay*.

CHASTISEMENT.

(*The whole Psalm.*)

Observe :

I. The twofold character of the Divine chastisements.

Ver. 1. "Only in love, not in wrath."—*Kay*. There is the chastisement of *anger*, and the chastisement of *grace*; the *punitive* and the *loving* chastisement. "There is a chastisement which proceeds from God's love to the man as being pardoned, and which is designed to purify or to prove him; and a chastisement which proceeds from God's wrath against the man, as striving obstinately against, or as fallen away from, favour, and which satisfies Divine justice."—*Delitzsch*.

1. The one is *measured*, the other *overwhelming*.

2. The one *destroys*, the other *perfects*.

3. The one is *temporal*, the other *eternal*.

Consider :

II. The grounds of appeal to the Divine clemency.

On what grounds can we entreat for the milder chastisement? The Psalmist

1. Recognises the *justice of the sufferings* under which he bows. He sees his sin, and feels it just that that sin should be punished. "David does not pray for the removal of the chastisement, but of the chastisement *in wrath*, or, what is the same thing, of the judgment proceeding from wrath."—*Delitzsch*. "I indeed confess that I deserve nothing but destruction; but because I could not endure the severity of Thy judgment, deal not with me after my deserts; yea, rather forgive the sins whereby I have provoked Thine anger against me."—*Calvin*. God's hand can only cease when we are brought to acknowledge the justice of the stroke.

2. He is utterly *broken down* by his

sufferings. All his ideas of pride and power are gone, and he is broken down in body and soul. (1.) In *body*. "Have pity on me, O Lord, for I am withered away. Drooping as a blighted plant."—*Kay*. "My bones are vexed." "The Hindoos, in extreme grief or joy, declare: 'Our bones are melted;' that is, like boiling lead, they are completely dissolved."—*Roberts*. (2.) In *soul*. "My soul is also sore vexed" (ver. 3). "His soul is still more shaken than his body. The affliction is therefore not a merely bodily ailment, in which only a timorous man loses heart. God's love is hidden from him. God's wrath seems as though it would wear him completely away. It is an affliction beyond all other afflictions."—*Delitzsch*. "To the man of God the bitterest drop in the cup of trouble is the sense of the wrath of God which he experiences in the chastisement of God."—*Tholuck*. "Soul-trouble is the very soul of trouble."—*Spurgeon*.

If we *despise* the chastisements of the Lord—that is, if we resent them, and rise up defiantly against them—they must continue punitive and destructive; but if our strength, pride, self-will, are utterly broken down, and we lie emptied of self at God's feet, then we may look for the punitive chastisements of the just God to change into the loving chastisements of the Merciful One. A "broken and contrite heart," &c.

3. He appeals to the *mercy of God* (ver. 4). "Oh, save me for Thy mercies' sake." He does not look upon himself as an ill-used man, but knowing himself as a great sinner, he casts himself on the sovereign mercy of Heaven.

4. He desires *to live to glorify God* (ver. 5). "Men who sink down to the grave unforgiven, unredeemed, they can-

not celebrate the glories of Thy mercy.”—*Kay*. In the midst of his sin and sorrow a sincere and passionate desire awakens in his soul for the honour and praise of God. He passes beyond mere selfishness into sympathy with the Divine rights and glory. “The petition has as its motive the fact that the Divine interest itself is concerned in the deliverance of the man who can render thanks well-pleasing to God, only as living, and not as one lost in death and swallowed up in Hades. Yet this is only one side of the thought. The other side is likewise brought into view, namely, that the petitioner has at heart to render thanks and praise to the glory of God. The relation is therefore in no respect a selfish one, in which the interests of selfishness prevail, but a moral and religious one.”—*Moll*.

5. He is *overwhelmed with sorrow* on account of his sin (ver. 6, 7). “My eye is eaten away with grief; eaten away, as by a moth fretting a garment.”—*Phillips*. The great deeps of his nature were broken up, and he would have been drowned in overmuch sorrow had it not been that hope bore him up Godward, as the ark rose with the flood. There is power indeed in true tears. “As music upon the waters soundeth

farther and more harmoniously than upon the land, so do prayers joined with tears.”—*Trapp*. “Even when the gates of prayer are shut in heaven, those of tears are open.”—*Hebrew proverb*.

It is when we plead as the Psalmist here pleads, that God’s anger is softened, and the chastisement of wrath is changed into the discipline of grace. “Let us pray, with our whole hearts, for mercy; and if the answer to our prayers be tardy, because we have deeply transgressed, let us knock; for to him that knocketh it shall be opened when prayers, groans, and tears beat at the door.”—*St. Cyprian*.

III. The Divine response to the prayer of penitence.

Ver. 8, 9. “They that sow in tears,” &c. “The Psalmist always contends with the Lord before he dares to contend with his foes.”—*Sutcliffe*. But having contended with the Lord, and found forgiveness, he boldly challenges, gloriously triumphs over, all his enemies. When God has delivered him from his sins, he feels that God will deliver him from his enemies. So if God pardon our sin, we need fear neither men nor devils. They have power over us only as long as our sins have hold of us, but when God pardons our sins they must fly.

SORROW FOR SIN.

(Verses 6, 7.)

I. The necessity for such sorrow.

Some speak slightly of repentance and sorrow for sin, but such sorrow is required from saints and sinners. It is natural and evangelical. “In respect to the Penitential Psalms, it is recorded of St. Augustine that in his last sickness he ordered these psalms to be inscribed in a visible place on a wall of his chamber, where he might fix his eyes and heart upon them, and make their words his own in the breathing out of his soul to God.”—*Wordsworth*.

II. Mistakes concerning this sorrow.

Many true penitents perplex themselves touching this matter of sorrow for sin. They think that they do not feel enough, feel long enough, &c., &c.

Let us be concerned :

1. About the *quality* of our sorrow, not its *quantity*. “Showers be better than dews, yet it is sufficient if God at least hath bedewed our hearts, and hath given us some sign of a penitent heart. If we have not rivers of water to pour forth with David, neither fountains flowing with Mary Magdalene, nor as Jeremiah desire to have a fountain in our head to weep day and night, nor with Peter weep bitterly; yet if we lament that we cannot lament, and mourn that we cannot mourn: yea, if we have the smallest sobs of sorrow and tears of compunction, if they be true and not counterfeit, they will make us acceptable to God; for as the woman with the bloody issue that touched the hem of Christ’s garment was no less welcome to Christ than Thomas

who put his fingers in the print of the nails, so God looketh not at the quantity, but the sincerity of our repentance.”—*Symson, quoted by Spurgeon.*

2. About the *reality*, not the *manifestation* of our sorrow. “Some may say, ‘My constitution is such that I cannot weep; I may as well go to squeeze a rock as think to get a tear.’ But if thou canst not weep for sin, canst thou grieve? Intellectual mourning is best; there may be sorrow where there are no tears; the vessel may be full though it wants vent; it is not so much the weeping eye God respects as the broken heart.”—*Watson, quoted by Spurgeon.*

3. About the *sincerity* of our sorrow, not its *duration*. Some mourn long on account of sin, but let us not doubt forgiveness because it comes the sooner to us.

III. The efficacy of this sorrow.

There is a “sorrow of the world which worketh death,” and there is a “godly sorrow,” which is unto life and salvation. “*Sin* draws after it *punishment*, and the *judgment* of an angry God is terrible; but only the impenitent sinner is lost, not the penitent. It is true, in *bitter, heartfelt grief* over his sins he experiences a *sorrow*, which not only grieves the soul, but also withers the body; but he feels at the same time that he is mightily *drawn towards God*

by this *godly sorrow*. He *confesses* his *guilt* and the *justice* of the *punishment* with which the holy God visits him, and makes known that he is well aware how richly he *deserves* the *disfavour* and *wrath* of God, and how he has *forfeited* his *life* with his sins. But he perceives in this very punishment that God is still *interested* in him, and he himself has still a *longing* after God. He can still *believe in grace*, and therefore *pray for life*; and in this consists the saving *change* which takes place in his condition.”—*Moll.* There is a Mohammedan legend respecting David, which says that after the treachery of which he had been guilty towards Uriah, the king was seized with the bitterest remorse. For forty days and forty nights he lay in the dust and wept; two rivulets gushed from his eyes, and the weeping willow and the incense-tree sprang up upon the spot. Is there not a great truth veiled in this wild fable? Whilst the weeping willow stands as a sign of that sorrow which bowed David's spirit to the earth, does not the incense-tree symbolise that faith and love of his which trembled up to heaven? When our sorrow for sin bows us down, let us still look up, and offering God the incense of a penitent, worshipping spirit, He shall not turn away our prayer.

THE NIGHT OF REPENTANCE.

(*The whole Psalm.*)

Night is about the Psalmist, and the night about him is an emblem of the night within him. He cannot sleep; all the night he waters his couch with his tears. The fact is, his sins have found him out, and he walks in darkness and in the shadow of death—the night of repentance.

Let us observe:

I. Its darkness.

There is darkness in the Psalmist's soul, the felt absence of God. “Return, O Lord” (ver. 4). God is away, the sun of the soul.

(1.) Darkness means *misery*. How great the sorrow here pictured! “Weak.” “Bones vexed.” “Soul also sore vexed.”

Sinner, be sure some day or other sin will make your soul weep and bleed. (2.) Darkness means *guilt* and *fear* (ver. 1). Here the Psalmist feels his guilt, and dreads the unknown terrors of God's wrath. (3.) Darkness means *death*. The Psalmist here dreads lest he should sink lower than the grave (ver. 5). He feels that his sin has brought him to the verge of everlasting destruction.

This is what sin brings us to. It robs the soul of light, of life. It leaves the sinner trembling within the shadows of hell.

II. Its duration.

“O Lord, how long?” (ver. 3). How swiftly time goes when we are living

joyfully! How long the hours, the months of suffering and unhappiness! Seven years are not long to a man with health, innocence, and freedom; but think of that period spent in a jail upon a treadmill! So to a man who lives in the love of God, the hours pass with "down upon their feet;" but how dreary and leaden-footed are the hours to a guilty soul! Sin takes all the glory and joy out of life, and makes us "curse the day that we were born." "The pleasures of sin are but for a season;" the pangs and penalties of sin embitter many days.

III. Its spectres.

"All mine enemies" (ver. 7). The Psalmist felt circumvented by enemies, and in his enemies he saw his sins. Men commit sins, and pass on as if they were to know those sins no more, but the day comes when they all live again. "God requireth that which is past," and conscience throws open the doors of memory, and out rushes a crowd of spectres. *Little sins; old sins; quiet sins; forgotten sins; white-washed sins;* all come from their graves. Ghosts of falsehoods; guilty recollections of envyings and hatreds; soiled apparitions of dead lusts; all return to accuse and condemn. Be sure that some day or other your sin will find you out; and a thousand spectres will people the darkness, and fill you with agony and fear.

IV. Its stars.

"Oh, save me for Thy mercies' sake" (ver. 4). The Psalmist seizes upon the idea of the Divine mercy, and out of this grand truth springs the bright constellations which cheer the penitent in his night of sorrow. The penitent remembers:

(1.) The *mercifulness* of the Divine nature. There is that grand star which arose out of the blackness of Sinai (Num. xxxiv. 6, 7). He "is *plenteous in mercy.*" "He *delighteth in mercy.*" "His *tender mercy.*" "Rich in mercy." "Abundant mercy." "His mercy *endureth for ever.*" Here are stars of light for the weeping eyes of penitence. (2.) The *promises* of the Divine mercy. These are "more than the sands of the sea-shore." Grand promises on every page of the Book! (3.) The *acts* of the Divine mercy. God forgave David, Noah, Saul, &c., &c. Which of them did He not forgive?

"Millions of transgressors poor,
Thou hast for Jesus' sake forgiven;
Made them of Thy favour sure,
And snatched from hell to heaven."

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of mercy. When the sinner is harassed by ghost and ghou, he looks towards the Gospel, and beholds great stripes of stars, which, in the sinner's ear, utter forth a glorious voice of consolation and hope. "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

V. Its sunrise.

Ver. 8, 9. "Mark the sudden change, as of sunrise upon night. Already the prayer and the weeping have been heard. Already faith has triumphed."—*Perowne*. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Sinner, watch for God more than they that watch for the morning, and He shall rise upon you with healing in His wings, and there shall be to you "no more night."

PSALM VII.

INTRODUCTION.

"From the matter of this psalm it appears that it was composed with reference to some calumny on the character of David; but commentators are not agreed as to when and by whom this injury was inflicted. Perhaps the conduct of Doeg might give occasion to this poem, inasmuch as this man had grossly misrepresented David to Saul, and insinuated that he was conspiring against the life of his king; whereas the very reverse of this statement was the truth."
—*Phillips*.

THE EXTREMITY AND ASYLUM OF THE SAINTS.

(Verses 1, 2.)

There can be but little doubt that this psalm was uttered by David when he was slandered by the courtiers of Saul, and when he was pursued by that deluded monarch. The situation of David is a picture of the situation in which all saints often find themselves.

Consider :

I. Their extremity.

The Psalmist was like a partridge on the mountains, "like a roe or gazelle chased by the lions."—*Perowne*. So are God's people frequently tempted, tried, borne down by various agents, and shapes of evil. (1.) The enemies of the righteous are *multiplied*. "All them that persecute me" (ver. 1). Some one has said, "If we have an enemy we meet him everywhere." This is very true of our great enemy the devil; we meet him everywhere. "His name is legion." "There is a devil in every berry of the grape," said Mahomet. Yes; and a devil in everything else with which we have to do. The diabolical creeps into everything, and the righteous man is ever menaced and endangered. In the flesh, in the world, in things necessary, things beautiful, things sacred, are ambushed enemies, bending the bow, and shooting privily at the righteous. (2.) These enemies are *malign*. "Lest he tear my soul like a lion rending it in pieces" (ver. 2). As a wild beast would tear to pieces a lamb, so would

the devil afflict the soul. How bitterly the devil hates the children of God! How bitterly the world often persecutes the saints! (3.) Those enemies are *resistless*. "While there is none to deliver" (ver. 2). He could not deliver himself, and he had no helper among men. His enemies felt that they reigned supreme and would crush him when they pleased. So with our spiritual foes. Policy, reason, pledges, &c., what are these but hirelings which flee in the hour of trial, and the wolf catcheth the sheep. A man measures himself in vain with the powers of darkness; these powers soon vanquish flesh and blood. No matter how strong the iron-clads of human building, the devil's artillery soon sinks them.

II. Their refuge.

"O Lord, my God, in Thee do I put my trust" (ver. 1). "With Thee have I taken shelter."—*Horsley*. (1.) The *security* of this shelter. The Almighty God. Better than walls of granite, than gates of brass, than lines of steel:

"Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure."

"God's assistance is the *strongest, quickest, and surest* help."—*Moll*. (2.) The *condition* of its enjoyment. (a) A personal relationship to God. "*My God*." (b) A constant faith in God. "*In Thee do I trust*." "The door is closed to prayer unless it is opened with the key of trust."—*Calvin*.

NOT GUILTY.

(Verses 3-10.)

The Psalmist, who so constantly acknowledges and bitterly deplores his sin, here puts in another plea. "He protests passionately his innocence, his soul surging with emotion as he thinks how unjustly he has been assailed."—*Perowne*.

Concerning this plea, let us observe :

I. We may plead "not guilty" of

some particular sin when we cannot plead freedom from sin.

"If I have done this" (ver. 3). We cannot plead freedom from sin (1 John i. 8), but we may plead freedom from particular faults with which we may be charged (Job xxxi. 16). Let us glorify the grace which has preserved us from so many sins to which we are prone.

II. We may plead "not guilty" before men when we cannot thus plead before God.

Job vindicated himself before his friends, but in the presence of God abased himself, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. We may often most properly assert our integrity before men, but "concerning the law of our God," it is another thing.

III. We may plead "not guilty" before God when we have rested in the merits of Christ.

"The righteousness of faith before God must be distinguished from righteousness and innocence of life before man; yet a true Christian must be able to console himself with both."—*Starke*. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." One of our legal writers says: "So completely does a pardon of treason or felony extinguish the crime, that when granted to a man, even after conviction or attainder, it will enable him to have an action of slander against another for calling him traitor or felon; because the pardon makes him as it were a new man, and gives him a new capacity and credit. In the eye of the law, the offender is as innocent as if he had never committed the offence." So completely does the blood and righteousness of Christ absolve us from sin.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame."

IV. When we can justly plead "not guilty" before God or man, we may rely on a triumphal acquittal.

Ver. 6-10. "Hitherto the Psalmist has protested his innocence; now, in the full consciousness of that innocence, he comes before the very judgment-seat of God, and demands the fullest and most public vindication. Then he sees as it were in a vision the judgment set: 'Thou hast commanded judgment.' Next, that sentence may be pronounced with due solemnity, he calls upon God to gather the nations round Him, and to seat Himself upon His judgment-throne. Lastly, he prays God, as the

Judge of all nations, to judge himself."
—*Perowne*.

We see here that God is the *Judge of all*. The whole "congregation;" all nations. God *can* judge *righteously*. Ver. 9. "The reins are the seat of the emotions, just as the heart is the seat of the thoughts and feelings. Reins and heart lie naked before God."—*Delitzsch*. God *will* judge *righteously*. He will condemn the guilty; He will establish the just.

Has our *reputation* been slandered? David feels bitterly the perfidious sayings of his foes, the injustice of their accusations. The French proverb says, "The tongue cuts deeper than the lance;" and David felt it to be so. Some men are said to labour under a strange necessity, that whenever they see a beautiful dress, they must throw vitriol on it; and so wicked men feel, and yield to, the devilish impulse of aspersing noble characters and noble names. Have we suffered from the tongues of such? Or have our *rights* been invaded? Have men unjustly touched our position, our freedom, our property? Nay, is our *life* taken away by violent or unjust men? Let us look confidently to the great assize. God will vindicate the just, and tread the proud oppressor in the dust. There is a famous picture entitled "Waiting for the Verdict." You may write that over all graveyards—"Waiting for the verdict." We play our part, and go our way, but for all God shall bring us into judgment; the silent nations underground wait the peal which shall call them to receive the final verdict, and the Judge of all the earth shall do right.

Observe:

1. The sense of innocence makes us *hopeful towards God*. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God" (1 John iii. 21).

2. The sense of innocence makes us *gentle towards men* (ver. 9). "His prayer is not directed against the individual as such, but against the wickedness that is in them. This psalm is the key to all psalms which contain prayers against one's enemies."—*Delitzsch*.

GOD AS A MAN OF WAR.

(Verses 11-13.)

In these verses, God's dealing with the unrighteous is vividly portrayed. We see God troubled by sin, and rising up to take vengeance upon it; and these verses are an epitome of the entire action of God with sinners. He is angry with them, and proceeds to bring them to reason.

Mark :

I. The Divine admonition.

"God is angry with the wicked every day" (ver. 11). *Barnes* says on this passage: "Continually, constantly, always. This is designed to qualify the previous expression, 'angry.' It is not excitement. It is not temporary passion, such as we see in men. It is not sudden emotion, soon to be succeeded by a different feeling when the passion passes off. It is the steady and uniform attribute of His unchanging nature to be always opposed to the wicked—to all forms of sin; and in Him, in this respect, there will be no change. The wicked will find Him no more favourable to their character and course of life to-morrow than He is to-day—no more beyond the grave than this side of the tomb. What He is to-day, He will be to-morrow and every day." This is no doubt true, but it is scarcely the truth taught in the text. Many of the great commentators agree that the sense of these words is—God is patient with sinners, and gives them daily warning of His displeasure, and of the gathering storm of His wrath. "If God will in the end let His wrath break forth, He will not do it without having previously given threatenings thereof every day, viz., to the ungodly (*cf.* Isa. lxvi. 14; Mal. i. 4). He makes these feel His anger beforehand in order to strike a wholesome terror into them."—*Delitzsch*. "God is not a Judge who punishes daily, but who threatens daily; for if God should punish us always, and as often as we deserve it, the world would no longer endure; therefore thou shouldst know that God's long-suffering invites thee to repentance."—*Moll*. "Although He is not angry every day—

i.e., His anger is not breaking forth upon every occasion—yet the season of judgment will surely come."—*Horsley*. Thus God is constantly warning the sinner. One of our philosophers speaks of "the premonitory symptoms of Nature's displeasure." So in the moral world are there premonitory symptoms of the Divine displeasure. Every day, in the sinner's conscience or body, intellect or estate, does God make signs of His gathering anger, so that the wicked may forsake their wickedness and escape the wrath to come.

Notice :

II. The Divine amnesty.

"If he turn" (ver. 12). "If he turn," there is forgiveness and life. Oh, most important "if"! *If* he turn, all is well; *if* he turn *not*, all is lost. Blessed opportunity! the sinner may turn. And all sinners have the ability to turn, for God commands them all to turn, and God does not command impossibilities. God's commands are promises; and when He invites all to return to Him, He strengthens all that they may do it. "Do not think God has done anything concerning thee *before* thou camest into being whereby thou art determined either to sin or misery. This is a falsehood, and they that entertain such thoughts live in a lie."—*Whichcote*. O sinner! improve this truce of God.

III. The Divine arsenal.

Ver. 12, 13. "He will whet His sword," &c. God is a man of war, and here we get a glimpse into His armoury, and behold the artillery with which He wars on obstinate sinners.

1. Mark the *variety* of His weapons. God's armoury is full of weapons. "Sword," "bow," "arrows." Storms, diseases, plagues, famines, wars, earthquakes, terrors of conscience, secrets of the prison-house we know not. God's armoury is full of awful weapons—weapons which can destroy both body and soul.

2. The *readiness* of His weapons. "He hath bent His bow and made it ready" (ver. 12). "He ordaineth His

arrows" (ver. 13). Or, "He will put His arrows in action."—*Horsley*. "The wrath of God may be slow, but it is always sure. In thoughtless security man wantons and whiles away the precious hours; he knows not that every transgression sets a fresh edge on the sword, which is there continually whetting for his destruction; nor considers that he is the mark of an archer who never errs, and who, at this very instant, perhaps, has fitted to the string that arrow which is to pierce his soul with everlasting anguish."—*Horne*. "The sword of Heaven is not in haste to smite, nor doth it linger."

Observe, finally :

3. The *deadly efficacy* of His weapons. "Instruments of death." "He ordaineth His arrows," or, as some translate it, "His arrows He maketh fiery." "Arrows wrapped round with some inflammable material, which become ignited in their passage through the air, and set on fire whatever they light upon."—*Peroune*. "The whetting of the sword is but to give a keener edge, that it may cut the deeper. God is silent as long as the sinner will let Him, but when the sword is whet it is to cut, and when the bow is bent it is to kill; and woe be to that man who is the butt."—*Lecker*, quoted by *Spurgeon*. " 'If I whet My glittering sword, and Mine hand take hold of judgment, I will render vengeance to Mine enemies' (Deut. xxxii. 41). And where will God whet His glittering sword ?

Where are blades usually whetted ? Let us look. Surely on a whirling, circular stone. And on what stone will God whet His sword ? I reply, On that stony heart of the sinner which is ever revolving, never at rest. Watch the grindstone a little while. See how it plunges down into a trough of turbid, foul, and muddy water. O stone, stone ! why rush down into this filth ? Rise up ! rise up from this uncleanness. I put my hand to it, I set the stone in motion. How easily is it made to revolve ! It moves—it leaves that sink of filth—it mounts upwards. In vain ! It whirls round, and with a rush seeks again its bed of pollution. Heart of sinner, hard and stony ! why dost thou not emerge from the corruption in which thou wallowest ? 'I will emerge,' thou repliest. Why dost thou not leave thy enmities, thy passions, thy shameful uncleanness ? 'I will leave them,' is the answer. And yet nothing comes of these fine promises. Always on the move like the grindstone, you never remove from the trough of slime; always leaving sin, that with fresh relish you may plunge into it again. Know, you sinners who are so full of good resolutions which come to nought, so full of promises of amendment which end in relapse, that it is on whirling grindstones such as you that the *glittering sword* of Divine vengeance is whetted. 'If I whet My glittering sword, I will render vengeance to Mine enemies.'"—*Joseph de Barzia*, 1600.

THE SELF-PUNISHING NATURE OF SIN.

(Verses 14-17.)

A somewhat different view of retribution is here given to that given in ver. 12, 13. There God is represented as using against the sinner His own peculiar weapons; here He is represented as beating and punishing His enemies with their own weapons. "Evil shall slay the wicked."

I. All sin is the digging of a pit.

Sin does not seek to rise by the stepping stones of lawful and noble endeavour; it knows of no eminence but by lowering others. *Ambition*, with its

throne-building, is yet a pit-digging. It seeks to raise itself on the trampled rights, and pleasures, and lives of others. *Lying* is a pit-sinking for others. *Lust* serves itself by ensnaring and debasing others. *Envy* sickens at another's joy, and seeks to secure itself by giving others a fall. *Covetousness* is always grave-digging, that it may inherit others' wealth. Sin would sink the throne of God. Sin knows not how to shine but by darkening others, knows not how to exalt itself but by depressing others,

knows not how to feast itself but by starving others, knows not how to enrich itself but by spoiling others, knows not how to save itself but by damning others. Pit-digging is *hard* work. The image of a travailing woman, in the 14th verse, reminds us that the development of evil is attended with severest labour and keenest sorrows. It is infinitely harder work to rise by violence, fraud, spoliation, than by virtuous paths. It may be hard to climb the steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar; but the bitterest toil is theirs who seek to rise by sinking. Pit-digging is *humiliating* work; it is a perpetual *stoop*. It kills all the nobility of a man; it is full of shame.

II. All sin sinks into the pit which it digs.

The workman rises with his work, and the workman sinks with his work. He who digs a pit for another digs a grave for himself. How often has the truth of these verses, 15 and 16, been seen by us! 1. *Nature* guarantees that it shall be so. The sinning member suffers; the sinner suffers on the same lines as he transgresses. 2. *History* teems with illustrations of this truth. In sacred and profane history we find a thousand examples of men falling into the pits they digged for others. 3. The *Scriptures* assure us that this will be so to the bitter end. "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.*"

ALPHA AND OMEGA.

(FIRST verse and the LAST.)

The contrast between the opening and the closing verse of this psalm is instructive. It reminds us—

I. That God's equity may be obscured in the beginning, but it shall be vindicated in the end.

In the first verse, God's righteousness is hidden; the wicked triumph. But in the last verse of the psalm all is clear, and the Lord is praised "according to His righteousness." Wait!

II. That the sinner's beginning

may be grand, but his end shall be disaster.

In the opening of the psalm the sinner is a lion, strong, proud, dominant; but in the end of the psalm the lion is howling in a pit. Wait!

III. That the saints may have beginnings of sorrow, but the end shall be triumphant.

With the commencement of the psalm David weeps and laments, but he ends with a song. Wait!

PSALM VIII.

INTRODUCTION.

"This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for the exaltation of man above all terrestrial creatures. It is quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews with reference to Christ; but whether it is to be considered a prophecy, or whether it is quoted simply because it describes by way of accommodation the character of our Lord, does not appear certain. The most sober commentators have adopted the latter view, considering that the author of the psalm intended simply to celebrate the glory of Jehovah, and the power and dignity He has conferred on the human race. It is, however, they say, appropriately applied to our Lord by way of illustration; for this power and dignity did not obtain their full consummation till He became invested with our nature, and was exalted 'above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.'"—*Phillips*.

THE GOSPEL OF THE STARS.

(Verse 1.)

We are led to consider:

I. Creation as deriving its glory from God.

The Psalmist here looks upon creation, not as *God*, not as *independent* of God, but as a glass reflecting the glory of

God. "*Thy heavens.*" "Who hast set *Thy glory*" above or upon the heavens. "It here implies that the glory belonging to the frame of nature is not inherent, but derivative."—*Alexander*. "The sense of God's presence, of which the Psalmist is so profoundly conscious in his own spiritual life, is that which gives its glory and its meaning to the natural world. There is a vivid realisation of that presence as of a presence which fills the world. Nature is full of God; nature is the theatre of His glory. All admiration of nature in a rightly-tuned heart is a confession of that glory. To such a heart there can be no praise of nature apart from the praise of God. All things are 'of Him, and through Him, and to Him.' Apart from Him, the unwise is void and waste; He gives it its life and meaning."—*Perowne*. "God is the principle of beauty, both as author of the physical world, and as father of the intellectual and moral world. He is the life, the light, the movement, the ineffable grace of visible and finite nature."—*Cousin*. Let us remember that the glory of creation is but the reflected glory of Him who sits above it. This is against *atheism, pantheism, naturalism*.

Consider:

II. Creation as revealing the glory of God.

THE APOLOGETICS OF CHILDHOOD.

(Verse 2.)

David speaks *literally* of children; and so our Lord Himself applies the words (Matt. xxi. 16). "Even the faith of a little child is bulwark enough against the folly of men of corrupt heart and perverted intellect. The stars above, and the lips of the infants below, show forth His praise."—*Perowne*.

The Psalmist has been looking at the magnificence of the firmament, and he passes at once to children, little children. But there is really no shock in this, for children are, as they have been justly and beautifully designated, "little majesties."

Observe:

The glory of God as seen in nature is:

1. *Unspeakable*. "*How excellent!*" No poet, no saint, can adequately speak of it. It fills us with a wonder and joy too deep for words. 2. *Gracious*. "*How excellent!*" The earth, so far as its primitive and essential arrangements are concerned, declares the loving God. The glory of God is His goodness. 3. *Universal*. "*In all the earth.*" Everywhere, under the whole heavens, we see the glory of God.

"Known through the earth by thousand signs,
By thousands through the skies."

"He whose eyes are open cannot want an instructor, unless he wants a heart."
—*Charnock, quoted by Spurgeon*.

Consider:

III. Creation as awakening admiration and love in the children of God.

"O Lord, *our Lord!*" Unbelieving men make nature to hide God, to put Him far away; but nature rejoices the saint as he beholds in it the workmanship of his Father. The sceptical philosopher is reminded by nature of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute; but the saint responds—

"This glorious God is *ours*,
Our *Father*, and our *Friend*."

I. The religious capacity of childhood.

This is indicated here. The young children with their first breath ask for God, and recognise Him in the glory of the universe. The spirituality of childhood is frequently recognised in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament Christ distinctly recognises the spirituality of the child-nature. The poet recognises in the child natural innocence and grace; the painter, physical beauty; the parent exalts the child from a sentiment of natural affection; but Christ gave children a conspicuous place in His teaching and system, on the ground of their spiritual faculty. The

children recognised Christ when the patriarchs of the nation failed to do so ; they welcomed Him when their fathers were cold and blind. Christianity is peculiarly, as no other religion has ever been, the religion of the children. Let them have it. Give them "the truth as it is in Jesus;" do not be sceptical about their conversion.

Observe :

II. The religious service of childhood.

"That Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." "The instinctive admiration of Thy works, even by the youngest children, is a strong defence against those who would question Thy being or obscure Thy glory. The effect, or rather the legitimate tendency of this spontaneous testimony, is to *silence enemy and avenger*, i.e., to stop the mouths of all malignant railers against God, whose cavils and sophisms are put to shame by the instinctive recognition of God's being and His glory by the youngest children."—*Alexander*. How often the simple speech of a little child cleaves to the heart of a great subject, and silences the gainsayer! "Have we never seen how a child, simple and near to God, cuts asunder a web of sophistry with a single direct question? How, before its steady look and simple argument, some fashionable utterer of a conventional falsehood has been abashed?"—*Robertson*. And it is remarkable how at great crises the children have become defenders of Christ and His cause. Notably, Matt. xxi. 16; and again in the Reformation. When Melancthon was greatly depressed about the fortunes of the Reformation, one day he passed a house in which he found some young people praying for the Protestant cause. Coming to Luther, he exclaimed triumphantly, "We are saved: the children are praying for us." And again, in the great revival of religion under Wesley and Whitfield. When Whitfield was preaching in New England, a certain lady became a subject of grace and a praying Christian. But she could influence none to pray with her but her little daughter, about ten years of age. This child was daily in her closet as a

witness of her cries and tears, and soon became the subject of Divine grace. The child, in a transport peculiar to such blessed experience, said, "O mother! if all the world knew this! I wish I could tell everybody! Pray, mother, let me tell all the neighbours, that they may be happy, and love my Saviour too!" "Ah! my dear child," said the mother, "it would be useless; if you were to tell your experience, they would call it a delusion." "O mother! I think they would believe me. I must go at once to the shoemaker, and tell him; he will believe me." She ran over, and found him at work in his shop. She began telling him that he must die; that he and she were sinners; but that Christ had heard her mother's prayers, and forgiven all her sins, and that now she was very happy. The shoemaker was struck; his tears flowed down like rain; he threw aside his work, and so earnestly cried for mercy as to alarm the neighbourhood; and in a few months from that time, about fifty people were brought to the saving knowledge of Christ. Whitfield, adverting to his preaching in Moorfields, says, "I cannot help adding, that several little boys and girls who were fond of sitting round me on the pulpit while I preached, and handed to me people's notes—though they were often pelted with eggs, dirt, &c., thrown at me—never once gave way; but, on the contrary, every time I was struck, turned up their little weeping eyes, and seemed to wish they could receive the blows for me. God make them, in their growing years, great and living martyrs for Him who, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, perfects praise!" There is a feast celebrated at Naumburg called the "Feast of Cherries," in which troops of children parade the streets with green boughs ornamented with cherries, to commemorate a triumph obtained in the following manner:—In 1432, the Hussites threatened the city of Naumburg with immediate destruction, when one of the citizens proposed that all the children in the city should be clad in mourning, and sent as supplicants to the enemy. Procopius Nasus, chief of the Hussites,

was so touched with this spectacle, that he received the young supplicants, regaled them with fruits, and promised them to spare the city. The children returned crowned with leaves, holding cherries, and crying "Victory!" Thus the children are often ambassadors for God, and their words, prayers, tears, often confound or melt "the enemy and the avenger." Every house that has a

child in it has a chaplain. Let us in the Christian Church believe more in the spiritual faculty of the children; let us teach them spiritual truth; let us believe in their conversion; let us economise their evangelic power. The smaller magnets have proportionately much the greater power; and the children have a remarkable spiritual force which the Church must not ignore.

THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

(Verses 3-9.)

We observe :

I. The apparent weakness of human nature.

"What is *man*?" "It describes man from the side of his impotence, frailty, and mortality." — *Delitzsch*. "*Man*. The Hebrew word denotes man in his weakness and frailty, as in the next member, *Son of man* (son of Adam), refers also to his earthly nature as formed out of the ground." — *Perowne*. "*What is man*? The first feeling is an overpowering sense of man's insignificance in presence of the vastness and splendour, the mysterious depth, and the exceeding glory of the heavens, as seen at night." — *Perowne*. Compare the *vastness* of creation with the *littleness* of man; the *power* of creation with the *feebleness* of man; the *duration* of creation with the *fugitiveness* of man. "One generation goeth, and another cometh, but the earth abideth for ever."

II. The essential greatness of human nature.

Ver. 5-9. "Although man appears so insignificant, yet, through God's marvellous condescension, how *great* is man, little less than Divine in nature, and lord of all creation." — *Perowne*. This greatness is found :

1. *In the quality of his being*. He is a partaker of the Divine nature. A "little lower than the angels." It is generally acknowledged that the A. V. does not give the full sense of the original of these words. "'Thou madest him *only a little lower than Elohim*;' so the original; and *Elohim* is by some rendered, as A. V., *angels*; but modern interpreters, however, generally are in favour of translating the words thus :—

'Thou madest him little less than God.'"

— *Wordsworth*. "Thou hast made him to want but little (or, to come short but little) of God." — *Perowne*. "And hast made him a little less than divine." — *Delitzsch*. "And madest him lack but little of God." — *Kay*. Man only *appears* insignificant. His rounded brow speaks more than the arched sky, his eyes shine out deeper things than stars, and in his lips there is a music beyond that of wind or wave. Less bright than the sun, less bulky than the planet, less abiding than the stars, he is greater than them all! "Noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in action like an angel, in apprehension like a god." — *Shakespeare*. The day was when the Church had to insist upon the depravity and degradation of human nature in opposition to the philosophy which descanted on the purity and dignity of human nature; now, perhaps, it is the duty of the Church to insist on the dignity of human nature in opposition to the dishonouring theories of modern science. The greatness of man is seen :

2. *In the extent of his dominion* (ver. 6-8). "Man is a king, and not a king without territory; the world around, with the works of creative wisdom which fill it, is his kingdom." — *Delitzsch*. "*All, everything, hast Thou put under his feet, i.e., subjected to his power.*" — *Alexander*. Earth, sea, sky (Gen. i. 26, 28, ix. 2). Man is God's vicegerent, and through man God seeks to govern all things. We ought to seek to exercise our regal glory in the right *spirit* and to the right *end*. "'All things under his feet' teaches us: (1.) To trample upon earthly things as base and bootless, not to dote

upon them with our hearts, nor grasp them greedily with our hands. (2.) By this posture of all things under man's foot God would teach him to use them as a stirrup, for the raising of his heart to those things above. A sanctified fancy can make every creature a ladder to heaven."—*Trapp*.

III. The source of the greatness of human nature.

HUMAN NATURE IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY.

This psalm is frequently quoted in the New Testament, and may be considered as an eminently Christian psalm. It is often objected to Christianity that it deals harshly with human nature, that it ignores the dignity of our nature, &c. We submit, on the contrary, that the Christian estimate of human nature commends itself to the common conscience in the sight of God.

I. Christianity recognises the intrinsic grandeur of human nature.

It asserts the *spirituality*, the *infinity*, the *immortality* of man. He is made in the image of God's spirituality, infinity, immortality. And Christianity gives the crowning illustration of man's mysterious greatness. The Psalmist, in the 4th verse, affirms that the glory of man springs from the condescension and visitations of God; but do we not find the supreme illustration of this verse in the fact that Deity, in Christ, took upon itself our human nature? Whilst scepticism is degrading human nature, talking of its origin in the ape, and its destination in the dust, Christianity crowns man with honour and glory by declaring that God took upon Himself our nature, and lived on the earth as man with man. The incarnation stands out as the crowning demonstration of the mysterious grandeur of human nature, and as a lofty protest against all those theories of sceptical science which would drag man down to the level of the beasts which perish.

II. Christianity restores the lost grandeur of human nature.

The Gospel denies that man, as we find him to be, dishonoured and dis-crowned, is as he ought to be; it says he ought to be far otherwise, and it

It is because God "is mindful of him." All his glory and empire is derived from God, and only continues whilst God blesses him. God puts the crown on our head; let us, in the spirit of ver. 9, lay that crown at His feet. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," &c. (Jer. ix. 23, 24).

seeks to put the lost sceptre into his hand, to restore the fallen diadem to his brow. It aims to restore:

1. *The glory of his character.* (1.) Christ becomes the *pattern* of life. He shows us what we may be, what we ought to be. How truly kingly is Christ! How glorious is the human character as seen in Him, arrayed in all the gold and purple of sublimest graces! (2.) Christ becomes the *perfecter* of life. He is the power to make us as glorious as Himself. "We all, with open face," &c. The Gospel aims to restore us faultless before the throne of God. It aims to restore:

2. *The fulness of his dominion.* This has been lost. A mere scrap of man's sovereignty is left to him in his fallen estate. Instead of ruling, man is ruled; instead of being a monarch, he is a slave. He is the sport of elements he was born to rule. But Christianity recognises man's right to rule, and seeks to fit him once more to exercise that rule. (1.) *In this world.* Whilst many of our scientific men are denying that the chief end of the earth is for man, Christianity insists that it is so. "The world is yours." As the Gospel prevails, the earth becomes more subjected to man. With the prevalence of Christianity you have the advancement of civilisation, of science, of art, and thus the earth is more and more made the property of the human race, and subordinated to the utility, and in a great measure to the command of man. As man acquires his kingly character in Christ, the world returns to its allegiance to him. (2.) *In the spiritual and eternal world.* "The centre of the New Testament consciousness is Jesus, the restorer of that which is lost. The dominion of the world lost

to fallen man, and only retained by him in a ruined condition, is allotted to mankind, when redeemed by Him, in fuller and more perfect reality. This dominion is not yet in the actual possession of mankind, but in the person of Jesus it now sits enthroned at the right hand of God. Everything is really put under Him with just as little limitation as is expressed in this psalm: not merely the animal kingdom, not merely the world itself, but the universe with all the ruling powers in it, whether they be in subjection or in hostility to God, yea, even the power of death (1 Cor. xv. 27 ;

cf. Eph. i. 22).—*Delitzsch.* And Christ is thus exalted on our behalf, to make us sharers of His power and empire.

Only in Christ can man's magnificent destiny be realised. "Man's destiny as depicted in this psalm is not, and cannot be, accomplished out of Christ. He is the true Lord of all. In Him man reigns, in Him man shall yet be restored to his rightful lordship, and shall really and completely be in the new world of redemption what now he is but very imperfectly, God's vicegerent, ruling a subject creation in peace, and harmony, and love."—*Perowne.*

PSALM IX.

INTRODUCTION.

"A psalm of thanksgiving (ver. 1, 2) after a victory (ver. 3) over the heathen wrought by Divine judgment (ver. 4-6), expressing confidence in His constant protection of the oppressed (ver. 7-10); therefore the pious have to thank God (ver. 11, 12), and pray to Him in every time of need (ver. 13, 14). The judicial government of God causes the enemies finally to perish, and saves the sufferers (ver. 15-18); therefore the prayer (ver. 19, 20), which shows the dangerous position of the Psalmist and his people."—*Moll.*

PRAISE.

(Verses 1-3.)

In the foregoing psalms we have had much prayer, but here we have a sublime burst of praise. The Psalmist's soul is filled with admiration and joy in view of the Divine character and government, and in glorious language he gives utterance to the ecstasy of his soul. There is something exceedingly sublime in praise; when we bless God, with the angels we take our part. One of our old poets has some quaint, but fine lines, "On Praise."

"Praise is devotion fit for mightie minds!
The differing world's agreeing sacrifice,
Where heav'n divided faiths united finds,
But pray'r in various discord upward flies.

"For pray'r the ocean is, where diversly
Men steer their course, each to a sev'ral coast;
Where all our int'rests so discordant be,
That half beg winds by which the rest are lost.

"By Penitence, when we ourselves forsake,
'Tis but in wise design on piteous heav'n;
In praise we nobly give, what God may take,
And are, without a beggar's blush, forgiv'n.

"Its utmost force, like powder's, is unknown!
And though weak kings excess of praise
• may fear,
Yet when 'tis here, like powder, dang'rous
grown,
Heav'n's vault receives, what would the
palace tear."

—SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT.

Let us notice, then, the thanksgiving of the text:

I. The minstrel.

"I will praise Thee" (ver. 1). "I will show forth Thy works." All God's works praise Him, but man is to be the leading singer in the great choir. The Esthonians have a beautiful legend to explain the origin of Song. The god of song descended on the Domberg, on which stands a sacred wood, and there played and sang. All creatures were invited to listen, and they each learnt some fragment of the celestial sound; the listening wood learnt its rustling, the stream its roar; the wind caught and learnt to re-echo the shrillest tones, and the birds the prelude of the song.

Man only grasped it all, and therefore his song pierces into the depths of the heart, and upwards to the dwellings of the gods. As this legend pictures, man's song is the fullest and the deepest; and whilst creation with her thousand voices praises God, from man comes the music which is sweetest to the throne of God. And *each* of us ought to find a tongue to bless God. "I will praise Thee." "I will be glad." "I will sing praise." We must not leave the organist and chorister to praise God for us, and ourselves stand dumb images in the pews. No proxy here. He has blessed *me*, and I will glorify Him. Gratitude ought to make musicians of us all.

Notice :

II. The harp.

"With my whole heart." The heart is the lyre wherewith to worship God. No instrument of music is so wonderful as this one—full of cunning pipes and exquisite strings; and this is the true harp to take into the closet, into the sanctuary. Not lips merely. "The heart is the instrument of praise, the mouth only its organ."—*Hengstenberg*. True praise is an overflow of feeling; we thank God for His goodness, and, as the French say, "There is a tear in our voice." "Making melody in our heart unto the Lord." "With my whole heart." The harp has many strings—some longer, others shorter, some of one tone and colour, whilst the other chords are differently tuned and coloured; and so there are many strings in that living harp with which we should praise God, and every chord should be smitten in His honour. Some of the cathedrals on the Continent contain several organs; and so in our breast are reason, will, imagination, sensibility, and we should summon every faculty to glorify God. Let us call upon all that is within us to bless the holy name.

Notice :

III. The song.

1. The *theme* of it; or rather, perhaps, we should say *themes*. "I will show forth *all* Thy marvellous works." I will praise Him for all His grace, gifts, deliverances, consolations, promises. "If we be willing to talk of His deeds, He

will give us enough to talk about."—*Power*. They are "*marvellous works*." "All the benefits received from God are real wonders to the humble soul, for it is an inconceivable grace that God the Lord should show so much mercy, bodily and spiritual, with wonderful wisdom and faithfulness to those who are in the highest degree unworthy."—*Starke*.

"We take the blessing from above,
And wonder at the boundless love."

And it is our duty to *show these forth*. Tell what God has done for you. "Songs without words," the unspoken and unspeakable joy and worship of the heart, are acceptable before God; but we must utter the memory of His great goodness that the world may know and believe. As one has said, "Christian experience will save the world."

2. The *joyfulness* of it. "I will be glad." The knowledge of God's love thrills the soul. When the devil played on our heart he brought out the dismal wailing of a perpetual "Dead March;" but if we yield our heart to God, it shall utter forth an endless "Hallelujah Chorus" of gladness and triumph.

3. The *object* of it. "I will praise Thee." "I will rejoice in Thee." "I will joy and triumph in Thee," not merely in Thy presence, or because of Thee, *i.e.*, because of what Thou hast done, but in communion with Thee, and because of my personal interest in Thee."—*Alexander*. In prayer there is a remembrance of ourselves, but in praise God fills our eye and our heart. As the harp-string passes out of sight trembling with music, so self is forgotten when we joy in God.

4. The *occasion* of it (ver. 3). "*Because* my enemies are turned back, *because* they stumble and perish before Thy countenance."—*Speaker's Com.* "The Romans in their triumphs presented a palm to Jupiter."—*Trapp*. So in each blessing, victory, joy, let us afresh tune our harps, and glorify the great source of all blessings. More than this, in the dark days let us take our harp from the willow and glorify God. The legend says that Orpheus was drowned, and it

is because his lyre is in the flood that the waters make such sweet music. Certainly the harp of David is never sweeter than when it sounds from a

flood of tears. "We glory in tribulation also. That is truly a new kind of men, that live among the dead, and are glad among the suffering."—*Luther*.

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IN ITS RELATION TO THE NATIONS.

(Verses 4-9.)

I. The Divine government is characterised by equity.

Ver. 4. "Thou satest in the throne judging right." "He shall judge the world in righteousness" (ver. 8). It sometimes *seems* as if God acted towards nations and men with a strange partiality, but it is really not so; deep down is the law of truth and righteousness, and all God's ways are equal. In the 4th verse the Psalmist says, "Thou hast passed sentence for me and done me right."—*Horsley*. And thus it shall be with each nation, each individual. The *Scriptures* assure us of this. *Conscience* testifies to this. Although we see the saint wronged, and the sinner triumphant a thousand times, yet conscience persistently testifies that justice will be done.

II. The Divine government is vindicated with severity.

Ver. 5, 6. "And cities, Thou, O God, hast rooted out; their memorial, even theirs is perished. What God destroys cannot be restored, and their cities are desolate for ever."—*Wordsworth*. "They are perpetual ruins."—*Perowne*. "The Psalmist appears to be speaking of the entire destruction of the cities of the enemy, and he seems to state in this clause that they should be completely desolated, so as to prevent any re-establishment of them at a future time; or so as to make it impossible for the work of desolation to be carried any further. *The memory of them has perished.*"—*Phillips*.

1. Observe, God's government will *vindicate* itself. Some one has said, "That the Spanish laws are the best in the world, but they are never acted upon." God's laws are the best laws, and, be sure, He will insist upon every one of them. 2. God's government vindicates itself *now*. "God does not postpone judgment and salvation till

the end of the world, although times of trouble come for the pious, and days of apparent victory for their enemies. He already judges *in history* individuals and nations, so that all traces of them are *blotted out* from the earth, and their name is *forgotten*."—*Moll*. Thrones founded in unrighteousness fall, fortunes are shipwrecked, cities perish, empires and armies melt. Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, Roman, Jewish—all are illustrations. 3. God's government vindicates itself with *awful severity*. God blots out the impenitent nation or person. The nations before Him are as the drop of a bucket, and, as such, are dried up in the hot light of His wrath, when once He is angry.

III. The Divine government survives all opposition.

Ver. 7. "The enemy has been utterly annihilated, whilst Jehovah remains King for ever."—*Perowne*. "The serene majesty of the eternal Judge is contrasted with the struggles and overthrow of evil men."—*Speaker's Com*. We are reminded (Isa. vi. 1.), "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." Kings die, and their kingdoms perish, but God sitteth a King for ever, and of His government there shall be no end. The kingdom of Christ will survive all hostilities—*political, ecclesiastical, philosophical, personal*.

IV. The Divine government comprehends all nations, and shall bring them all into judgment.

Ver. 8. "And He shall judge the world in righteousness, He shall minister judgment to the peoples in uprightness." He will apply to us in modern times the same severe tests which He applied to the peoples of the past; and if, when weighed in the balances, we are

found wanting, He shall blot out *our* name from under the heavens. Let us honour God in our age and nation, for if we rule, and legislate, and serve in

His fear, our throne shall be established; and the way for God to dwell in a nation is for every one to see that God dwells in his heart.

GOD THE PROTECTOR AND AVENGER OF THE OPPRESSED.

(Verses 9-13.)

God has His eye on the strong and unjust, and He will not fail to punish them; He has His eye on the weak and faithful, and will vindicate their cause. What a record of injustice is history! How the true, good, noble, in every age, have been wronged! Thousands are still being similarly wronged. What is the relation of God to these?

I. He is their Protector.

Mark:

1. The *strength* of this protection (ver. 9). "The Lord will be a *refuge*." "Properly, as in the margin, a high place, a fort on the summit of an inaccessible rock, such as often afforded a refuge to David in early days of exile."—*Speaker's Com.* What a power there is in the grace of God to lift a man above his trouble! The blessing of God comes down on His tried and persecuted people, and they feel at once they are sweetly lodged in an *inaccessible* Rock. Violence cannot overturn it; Sorrow cannot get a foothold in it; Fear cannot scale it; the devil can find no secret winding in it by which he may reach the saints. It is a rock of strength and safety, and blessed are all those who claim its shelter.

"How happy are the little flock,
Who, safe beneath their guardian-rock,
In all commotions rest!

'When war's and tumult's waves run high,
Unmoved above the storm they lie;
They lodge in Jesus' breast."

2. The *seasonableness* of it (ver. 9). "A *refuge* in times of trouble, *i.e.*, steeped in trouble."—*Kay*. If it were a physical presence, we might sometimes justly say, "Lord, if thou hadst been here," this and that disaster would not have occurred; but the spiritual presence is

ever with us. He is a *help* in the time of trouble; a *present* help, a *very* present help. In South-Eastern India there is a wild race which believes that all the evil in the world is done whilst God is sleeping; if He were not obliged to sleep there would be no sickness, no sorrow, no death. What a comfort to feel that God's eyes neither slumber nor sleep, and that He is never far from any one of us. God is the nearest to us when we want Him the most.

3. The *immutability* of it. "Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee" (ver. 10). "*Has never failed* them that seek Thee."—*P. B. Version*. And He never will.

II. He is their Avenger.

Ver. 12. "Like the Goël, the next of kin, who was bound to avenge the murder of his kinsman, so God *calls* the murderer to account, *requires* satisfaction at his hand."—*Perowne*.

Let us learn:

1. *Not to oppress*. It is a fearful thing in anywise to wrong our brother. The cry of the oppressed reaches God, and God cannot rest on His throne until that cry is avenged. Let us not do anything against our brother's rights, freedom, property, conscience, happiness, life, character. He "has no friend, kick him." But the weak man at your feet *has* a Friend; don't kick him, help him on his feet, and God shall bless you.

2. *In oppression trust in God*. "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee" (ver. 10). "*Those knowing Thy name, i.e.*, those who are acquainted with Thy power."—*Phillips*. Such will trust God. "They can do no otherwise that savingly know God's sweet attributes and noble acts for His people."—*Trapp*.

THE PERSONAL REALISATION OF GENERAL TRUTHS.

(Verses 13, 14.)

The Psalmist has been dealing with great principles, and regarding these in their application to great nations and long periods of time, when he interrupts the general reflection by this personal cry. These two verses are considered to break the unity of the psalm, and interfere awkwardly with its general strain of triumph."—*Delitzsch*. But we must remember that the Psalmist writes as a man, not as an artist, and we have here the instinctive, irrepressible cry of his heart.

He recognises :

I. His personal fault.

"Have mercy upon me, O Lord" (ver. 13). Is there not here a recognition of his own unworthiness, as well as his own suffering? He asks for help, but it is on the ground of mercy. So should we ever in acknowledging the corruption of human nature remember the corruption of our own; and in deploring the sin of the world take care to deplore our own sin. How often we forget this! The woman of Samaria was versed in theological lore, and acknowledged with freedom various great religious principles, but how strangely she forgot her own personal situation! In the presence of Sinai, of Calvary, of an imperfect and guilty race, let us cry before Heaven, "God be merciful to *me*, a sinner."

II. His personal need.

"Consider *my* trouble" (ver. 13). Whilst the Psalmist thought of the general sorrow, he recalled before God his own. Every heart knows *its own* bitterness, and it is our privilege to make our case known to God. Every one of us may go to God and cry, "Consider *my* trouble." We cannot go with every little ailment to the doctor, nor with every little perplexity to the lawyer, nor with every little trouble to a friend; but we may go to God with all our distresses, and He will give us audience and relief. He appeals to God as

III. His personal Helper.

"Thou that liftest *me* up" (ver. 13). He has seen in God the world's Judge and Redeemer, and he now recognises God as his God. Let us not stay short of this personal relationship and plea. Let us not lose ourselves in a crowd. Let us be able to say, "O Lord, Thou art *my* Lord, and *my* God, and *my* Helper." Finally, the Psalmist vows :

IV. His personal consecration.

Ver. 14. "That I may show forth," &c. In "the gates," as the most public place of concourse. It ought not only to be, "All the earth praises Thee," but also, "Bless the Lord, O *my* soul." Our voice, profession, gifts, service are needed. *I* must praise God, acknowledge Him, love Him, and seek to build up His kingdom.

THE EXTREMITIES OF THE SAINTS.

(Verses 13, 14.)

Observe :

I. The depth of their distress.

"Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death" (ver. 13). "From desperate and deadly dangers, such as threaten present destruction, and show a man the grave even gaping for him. David was oft at this pass; and God delivered Paul from so great a death (2 Cor. i. 10). He commonly reserveth His hand for a dead-lift, and rescueth

those who were even talking of their graves."—*Trapp*. Believers are often brought "very low." *Constitutional infirmity; bodily sickness; worldly trouble; spiritual conflicts; persecution*; these often depress and bewilder the saints, and they are at their "wits' end."

II. The fulness of their deliverance.

"In the gates of Jerusalem" (ver. 14). He brings His people from the

gates of hell to the gates of glory. "There is a beautiful contrast between 'the gates of death,' in the preceding verse, and 'the gates of the daughter of Sion,' or the heavenly Jerusalem, in this—the one leads down to the pit, the other up to the Mount of God; the one opens into perpetual darkness, the other into light eternal; from the one proceeds nothing but what is evil, from the other nothing but what is good; infernal spirits watch at the one, the other are unbarred by the hands of angels. What a blessing, then, is it to be snatched from the former, and transported to the latter."—*Horne*. 1. God has thus lifted up His people in their *conversion*. They were "snatched as brands from the burning," and placed in safety in the Church, which is the "gate of heaven." 2. God does thus lift up His people in their *experience*. When our sins, our sorrows, our sufferings, our persecutors have brought us very low, how God interferences on our behalf, and turns the shadow of death into the morning! 3. God will thus lift up His people from *death and the grave*. He will transfigure their crown of thorns into amaranth; change their corruptible into incorruption; raise them from the dust and worms to stars and angels!

"Millions of transgressors poor
Thou hast for Jesus' sake forgiven;
Made them of Thy favour sure,
And snatched from hell to heaven."

III. The expression of their gratitude.

"That I may show forth all Thy praise," &c. (ver. 14). "That I may recount all Thy praise." "This is one

important end for which he asks to be delivered, namely, that God may have the praise of his deliverance."—*Alexander*. We will praise Him on earth, and surely no song in heaven shall be louder and sweeter than ours.

"My soul, through my Redeemer's care,
Saved from the second death I feel,
My eyes from tears of dark despair,
My feet from falling into hell.

"Wherefore to Him my feet shall run,
My eyes on His perfections gaze;
My soul shall live for God alone;
And all within me shout His praise."

Lessons:

1. *In the darkest hours do not despair.* In the darkest hours of life, of death, do not despair. At the gates of death, believe, hope! "There is nothing desperate in the state of good men where there is a right principle within them, and God's superintendency over them."—*Whitchote*. "When the axe already touches thy neck, still hope in God's saving grace."—*Talmud*. From the deepest pit we see the stars. 2. *In the darkest hours remember that the depth of the shade prophesies the fulness of the glory which is to be revealed.* As much as you are brought low, so much shall you be lifted up. From gates of death you spring to beautiful gates of lofty Christian life and worship; to pearly gates, golden gates of heavenly rest and victory. Men measure mountains by their shadows; and so from the sorrows of to-day we may argue somewhat to the grandeurs which await us. But even then we must remember that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us."

RETRIBUTION.

(Verses 15-20.)

We are taught here:

I. **That the pit of human misery and ruin is digged by man, not by God.**

"The pit that they made" (ver. 15). Yes; all the pits into which man falls are self-digged. That is true of all the *pits on earth*. God's laws were all made for man's good and joy, but we create misery for ourselves. What scenes of

misery there are on the earth—jails, madhouses, penitentiaries, &c., &c.; but God did not design these places. In the original arrangement of things our perfection and pleasure alone were designed; but pride, appetite, folly, covetousness, have dug the horrible pits from whence come up evermore sighs of misery and despair. This is true of the *pit of*

hell. God made Eden for us, the beautiful earth, heaven beyond; but we make hell for ourselves. We build its prisons, kindle its fires, forge its fetters, originate its woe. As *Dr. Griffin* says, "God is right, and man is wrong."

II. That sin may be cleverly devised and executed, but its frustration is certain.

"The pit that they made, the net which they hid." How subtly they have been conceived and wrought! Sin is often an attempt to *overmatch man*; to take advantage of his ignorance, or weakness, or unwariness. It is always an attempt to *overmatch God*. It is dexterously done, so to break the laws of God as to escape the threatened penalty. But it does not succeed. The sinner falls into the pit, is taken in the snare. We think of cheating man, devil, God; but we shall only cheat ourselves.

III. That sin may long remain unpunished, but its punishment is certain.

"The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth" (ver. 16). "*Known is Jehovah*, or has made Himself known. *Justice has He done*, or judgment has He executed. God has revealed Himself as present and attentive, notwithstanding His apparent oblivion and inaction, by doing justice on His enemies, or rather by making them do justice on themselves." — *Alexander*. God will arise to punish sinners; and

the punishment shall be all the more terrible for the delay. *V. Hugo* says concerning the sea: "Beware of the gale that has been long delayed. It was Angot who said that 'the sea pays well old debts.'" Sinner, beware of the wrath long delayed; justice pays well old debts.

IV. That the final punishment of sin is overwhelming.

Ver. 17. "Not the heathen, *as such*, but all (of whatever race) who *wilfully forget* and put away from them that knowledge of Himself which God has inscribed on men's consciences." — *Kay*. "God's righteousness shall be seen in cutting off the wicked by a sudden and premature end." — *Perowne*.

Lessons:

1. *The saints must trust in God* (ver. 18). "The patient abiding of the meek" shall not be in vain. — *P. B. Version*.

2. *The ungodly must tremble at the judgments of God* (ver. 20). They are "*but men*," however proud and defiant they may be. "Crowns leave their wearers, *but men*, degrees of eminent learning, make their owners not more than *men*; valour and conquest cannot elevate beyond the dead level of '*but men*;' and all the wealth of Cræsus, the wisdom of Solon, the power of Alexander, the eloquence of Demosthenes, if added together, would leave the possessor but a *man*." — *Spurgeon*. And what can *man* do when God awakes to judgment?

PSALM X.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm seems to belong to the time of the Captivity, or the return of the captives. It was probably made in reference to Sanballat, and the other enemies of the Jews. There is a great similarity between this and the 12th, the 14th, the 35th, and the 53d. In these, as Calmet remarks, we find the same complaints, the same sentiments, and almost the same expressions." — *Dr. A. Clarke*.

SOUL PERPLEXITY.

(Verses 1, 2.)

I. The problem.

"*Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?*" &c., i.e., "like an idle, passive spectator, unconcerned at the misery which he sees, but refuses to relieve." — *Perowne*. "*The wicked in his pride doth*

persecute the poor." "Through the proud dealings of the wicked, their victims are placed in the fire or furnace of affliction." — *Perowne*. "Through the pride of the wicked the afflicted man burns." — *Moll*. The soul is sorely

puzzled with this painful problem, and asks earnestly, Why is it thus? Let it be observed, this is not—(1.) A *presumptuous* question. “The meaning is not that of searching for the reason.”—*Moll.* There is no disposition to know the secret things which belong unto the Lord. (2.) Not a *murmuring* question. “In the *anguish* of external trouble and internal affliction, the pious may, with propriety, urge God to hasten to their relief; but although the voice of their *lamentation* may resound, yet it must not contain a *complaint* against God, as if He improperly delayed, or as if He left the afflicted in continual danger *without reason*, or as if He had *purposely* shut His eyes and ears against their need and prayers. In the realisation of their *weakness*, they must give themselves and their cause entirely into the hands of God.”—*Moll.* Neither is it, (3.) A *despairing* question. “The good soul knows that God waiteth to be gracious; and as He seldom cometh at our time, so at His own (which is ever the best) time, He never faileth.”—*Trapp.* It is a lover’s question; it is the cry of a righteous man, impatient that justice should be done; but it is a question nevertheless which bespeaks the deep sorrow and perplexity of the religious soul. A little child cried in the night, and the parent came to correct it; said the little thing, “Whip me, but don’t leave me.” Thus, the bitterest trial of the saints is the consciousness of God’s absence.

II. The solution.

The explanation of the problem may be found: 1. Partly in regard to *our personal discipline*. (1.) It rebukes *our*

faults. In these hours of sorrow, we remember our faults. (2.) It reminds us of our personal *helplessness*. We never know the preciousness of our friends until we have lost them; and it seems necessary that our greatest Friend should withdraw His presence sometimes, so that we may realise His preciousness more fully, and know how helpless we are without Him. (3.) It drives us *nearer to God*. 2. Partly in respect to the *salvation of the wicked*. God delays to do justice that the wicked may have space for repentance. It may be that the wicked abuse these delays, put upon them a wrong interpretation, but God grants the longer delay, that the sinner may turn and live. Thus, if the righteous suffer because Heaven delays its judgments, let them not complain. Let them regard their sufferings on this account as vicarious suffering, as identifying them with their thorn-crowned Master, who was bruised for our iniquities, and by whose stripes we are healed. God is sublimely patient, bearing with sinners, and suffering whilst He bears; let us imitate His long-suffering, and not complain at the delays of justice, because such delays are in the interests of mercy and salvation. 3. Certainly, in regard to *the glory of God*. God will not dishonour Himself by hiding Himself; when all things are seen clearly, the Divine attributes will shine all the brighter for these obscurations. Each explained mystery will be a crown on God’s head; not one of them a blot on God’s throne. The throne at last will be “A great white throne” (Rev. xv. 3, 4).

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

(Verses 3-14.)

We have here a full-length portrait of the practical atheist. The Psalmist is not speaking of the theoretical atheist, not of the man who ignores God with his lips, but who ignores Him in his life.

Let us mark:

I. The *nature* of this atheism.

1. The atheism here spoken of *ignores*

God in actual life (ver. 4). “God is not in all his thoughts.” “THERE IS NO GOD: not that he is literally an atheist, but that the whole of his conduct, all his purposes and schemes, are carried on as if there were no God—in a practical denial of His existence.”—*Perowne*. “David does not speak of the

words, but of the innermost thoughts, of the wicked—their practical, it may be half-conscious atheism.”—*Speaker's Com.* How much of this secret atheism there is in the world! How often in the bed-chamber of the heart do men curse the King! How continually do men acknowledge God, and yet in their conduct deny Him! The Chinese acknowledge no God in their creed, and yet their houses and shops and streets are full of idols. The reverse of this is seen in Christendom; our creed is full of God, and then we shut Him out from our shops, homes, hearts.

2. The atheism here spoken of *excludes God from systems of thought*. “No God, is the whole of his philosophy” (ver. 4).—*Horsley*. Such are intended as those who (1.) Acknowledge that *God is, but that He cannot be known*, putting God at a vast and inaccessible distance; (2.) Those who contend that *we cannot affirm or deny God's existence*; (3.) Those who deny a *personal God*. “To deny the existence of a living, acting, all-punishing (in one word, a personal) God, is equivalent to denying the existence of any real and true God whatever.”—*Ewald*. Ver. 11. “The thought of a personal God would disturb the ungodly in his doings, he therefore prefers to deny His existence, and thinks there is only fate, and fate is blind, only an absolute, and it has no eyes, only a notion, and that cannot interfere in the affairs of men.”—*Delitzsch*.

We notice :

II. The history of this atheism.

This atheism is here shown to spring from the pride and corruption of the heart.

1. In the second verse the atheist is shown to be *personally corrupt*.

2. Next, he *glories in his corruption*. “For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire” (ver. 3). “He giveth praise to his heart's desire.”—*Perowne*. “To his soul's lust.”—*Kay*. “He blesses and idolises himself; he sings hallelujahs to himself, and forgets God.”—*Wordsworth*. “This seems to be a description of the last stage of corruption, in which men openly defend or applaud their own vices.”—*Alexander*.

3. The wicked man not only glories in his own shame, but *has pleasure in those who do such things*. “He blesteth the covetous.”

Out of this rampant wickedness comes—(1.) The *hatred of God*. “He abhorreth the Lord.” When we have wronged any one, the next thing is we hate them. (2.) The *ignoring of God* (ver. 4). “He is so wrapped up in his rapacious propensities that he forsakes and altogether despises God.”—*Phillips*. Here we have the devil's chain. Each several link is manifest of that awful fetter with which the devil binds his victims ere he casts them into hell. Many of our sceptics give atheism a very proud lineage; its ancestors are thought, logic, love, and righteousness; God's Word declares atheism to be the monstrous child of corruption. Yes; atheism springs not from a clear head, but a disordered heart; it is not the characteristic of a pure and simple age, but of a civilisation debauched with luxuries, and mad with pride.

III. The characteristics of it.

1. *Pride* (ver. 4). “Through the pride of his countenance.” “The wicked in the height of his scorn.”—*Speaker's Com.* Ver. 5. “His ways are always victorious.”—*Ewald*. Job xii. 6. His ways always prosper, and he is full of pride. “Thy judgments,” &c. God's judgments, His punishments for sin, are so far out of the sight of the wicked that he acts as if they could never reach him.”—*Perowne*. “As for all his enemies,” &c. He cares as little for man as he does for God.

2. *Presumption* (ver. 6). “In his unbounded carnal security he lets his wicked tongue have free course.”—*Delitzsch*. “The idea of the wicked is that they and their families would continue to be prosperous, that a permanent foundation was laid for honour and success, and for transmitting accumulated wealth and honours down to far-distant times.”—*Barnes*. For ever and ever they shall flourish.

3. *Practical and outrageous wickedness*. Blasphemy, falsehood, injustice, cruelty, murder. When you have ignored God, and denied His intervention in the affairs

of men, you have opened the flood-gates of iniquity.

IV. The doom of it.

Ver. 12, &c. God marks and punishes this atheism, and what springs out of it. In the 11th verse the wicked say: "*God hath forgotten,*" &c. But, says the Psalmist in the 14th verse: "*Thou hast seen it, to requite it.*" "There is a time coming, he feels assured, when all

this disorder will be set right. God is not the passive spectator of human affairs which these men deem Him. He 'considers' (i.e., regards with interest and sympathy) what is going on. The helpless, therefore, may leave all to God." —*Perowne*. And woe unto the godless (ver. 15, 16). "Let the wicked and his wickedness disappear, so that even when sought for it cannot be found." —*Perowne*.

BLACK ARTS.

(Verses 7-18.)

A missionary who recently returned from Polynesia brought home with him a curious object called a soul-trap. This consisted simply of a series of rings twisted in cocoa-nut fibre. If a native should commit a great offence, or have the misfortune to offend a sorcerer, the latter immediately proceeds to make a new ring in his chain, so as to form a trap to catch the poor man's spirit. Soon a bird or butterfly alights on the ring, and the sorcerer asserts that the soul of the culprit assuming this form has passed into the trap. It is immediately known throughout the tribe that a certain man has lost his soul. As a matter of fact, it invariably happens that the soulless man shortly afterwards dies, of course through sheer mental distress at having had his soul thus entrapped. We smile at such traps, but we are all familiar with soul-traps of a far more subtle and dangerous character. In the verses before us the Psalmist vividly pictures the crafty schemes of the wicked in order to entrap their victims. They seek by most subtle arts to entangle and destroy.

I. It is thus that selfish men set traps for the young and inexperienced.

With lies and enticements the covetous seek to entrap and destroy the young. Soul-traps for the young! How numerous they are! How cleverly contrived! The utmost artifice and plausibility. How successful they are (ver. 10). "Crouching down as low as possible, he lies on the watch, and the feeble and defenceless fall into his strong ones, i.e., claws." —*Delitzsch*. How many thus fall! Our cities are full of fallen young men and women. We have thou-

sands of heartless men in society answering to the vile robber pictured in these verses. For the sake of gain and lust, they set traps in which the health, honour, happiness, and hope of the youthful perish. The whole civilised world was shocked the other day by the discovery that, by means of an infernal machine, a villain sent ships and their crews to the bottom of the sea for the sake of the insurance money; but thousands of atheistical, covetous men, for the sake of gain, are ingeniously seeking to sink the souls of the people in the gulf of hell. May God save our young people from their cruel schemes!

II. It is thus that the world contrives traps for the godly.

The world does not like the godly, and in various subtle methods it seeks to worst them. It has traps for their reputation. "His mouth is full of perjury and deceit." He sets a net of cunningly-devised speech, that he may be able to bring their good name into discredit. It has traps for their fortune. It will "privily seek" to damage their circumstances. It will adroitly circulate reports, frame laws, to bring them into financial trouble. It has traps for their character. They know the natural weaknesses of a Christian, and they bait their hook, set their net, accordingly. He is short-tempered, and they contrive to put in his way occasions of anger; he is given to levity, and they provoke his mirth; he has strong appetites, and they put drink to his lips; he is feeble in faith, and they press him with scepticisms. The world hates the righteous, and when it cannot injure them openly, it will secretly. The devil is a wily

destroyer, and his children imitate his tactics, and seek "to murder the innocent."

III. It is thus that Satan sets traps for us all.

He is the great bandit pictured in the text; he is the great sorcerer whose soul-traps beset us at every turn. What a clever fowler is he! what a politic huntsman! what a subtle angler! The devil hides himself, he disguises his movements, and in an evil hour men are drawn "into the net." Here he betrays by *pleasure*. Bates tells us of a spider in South America which looks like a blossom, and insects alighting on it for sweetness find death. So the great foe, under the aspect of pleasure, betrays thousands. Here he betrays by *honour*. One of the Roman Emperors used to fish with a net of purple and gold; the devil has used this net largely, and taken great prey. And by *many other devices* does he destroy the unwary. Beware! That was a clumsy soul-trap in Polynesia, but the sorcerer of hell has traps of strange power—of damning efficacy. Beware of those soul-traps made of flowers called pleasure; of those purple-lined ones called greatness; of those gay-painted ones called fashion; of those scientific ones called philosophy; of those jewelled ones called honour; of those golden ones called wealth. "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." The devil will lie, fawn, flatter, and do this patiently for years to ruin us.

1. *Let the innocent put their trust in God.* "The afflicted committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless" (ver. 14). Alas! for us if we attempt to stand in our own strength, and take our defence into our own hands. "He that takes himself out of God's hands into his own, by and by will not know what to do with himself."—*Whichcote*. And in our darkest hours of temptation and trial, we may have the fullest assurance that God has not forgotten us. The wicked say: "God will never see it" (ver. 11). But the Psalmist replies: "Thou hast seen it; for Thou beholdest mischief and spite to requite it with Thy hand" (ver. 14). "The Psalmist means to

say, so far from the assertion of the wicked man being true, that God is forgetful of the poor; He is, on the contrary, observant of their trouble and vexation; and in order not to forget their calamities, He places a memorial of them on His hands (see Isa. xlix. 26). *I have engraven thee on the palms of My hands*; which would be done for the purpose of assisting the memory."—*Phillips*. God has not forgotten His tried ones who look to Him; He will not forget them. "The Lord preserveth the simple."

"As far from danger as from fear,
Whilst Love, Almighty Love, is near."

2. *Let the innocent walk circumspectly.* "Lurking places," "secret places," "eyes privily set," "lieth in wait secretly." "He croucheth." "The image is that of a beast of prey, a fox or a wolf, lying upon the watch about the farm-yard in the evening."—*Horsley*. This great enemy is ever on the watch for us in the world. Ambushed often where least expected. And in the Church. The wolf prowls about Christ's fold. Let us (1.) Live in the *spirit of watchfulness*. (2.) Let us be specially on our guard against *what promises unusual gain, or liberty, or pleasure*. The angler makes his artificial fly as big, and fat, and dazzling as he can, and the devil acts thus with the bait which he dangles before human souls. (3.) Let us *keep as far from danger as we possibly can*. They try sometimes how near they can swim to the Niagara falls without going over—it is not wise. God will keep us, if we strive thus to keep ourselves.

3. *Let any who are in the snare of the devil look up to the Deliverer.* It is best to keep out of Satan's claws, but Christ can deliver us from the paw of the lion and the mouth of the bear. In the devil's trap, held by the iron teeth of evil, stained with blood and tears, look up, and Mercy's hand shall liberate you, and you shall sing: "My soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and I have escaped."

4. *Let the wicked be assured that God's eye is upon them, and that justice must overtake them* (ver. 15). "Because the

Lord continues to spare them, therefore they go on to provoke Him. As He adds to their lives, so they add to their lusts. Because justice seems to *wink*, men suppose her *blind*; because she delays punishment, they imagine she denies to punish them; because she

does not always reprove them for their sins, they suppose she always approves of their sins. But let such know that the silent arrow can destroy as well as the roaring cannon. Though the patience of God be *lasting*, yet it is not *everlasting*."—*Spurgeon*.

PSALM XI.

INTRODUCTION.

"The friends of David advise him in this psalm to flee unto the mountainous parts of the land of Judah, in order to avoid the danger which was threatening him, should he remain in the place where he was then residing. The psalm is written in the form of a dialogue, of which the first three verses contain the advice of David's friends, and the remaining portion his reply, wherein he declares his unshaken confidence in God, and his conviction that the wicked will be punished, and himself duly protected."—*Phillips*.

MORAL COURAGE.

(Verses 1-7.)

We have in this psalm a striking illustration of Christian heroism. The Psalmist is found in circumstances of great moral perplexity and personal danger, but he stands his ground trusting in God.

We notice :

I. The severity of the trial.

David's timid counsellors bring before him several pressing reasons why he should despair of his cause, and retire from the scene of conflict. They urge—

1. The *desperate designs* of his enemies. "They bend their bow, and make ready their arrow upon the string" (ver. 2). They will take his life; their thoughts are thoughts of blood. 2. Their *perfidious policy*. "That they may *privily* shoot at the upright in heart" (ver. 2). They were prepared to resort to the basest stratagems to compass his death. 3. Their *successful action* (ver. 3). "What hath the righteous done?"—*P. B. Version*. "The question in the last clause of this verse implies that the righteous have effected nothing in opposition to the prevalent iniquity."—*Alexander*. "If Saul, who is the vicegerent of God, has cast aside his fear, and now regards neither truth nor justice, a righteous man has no security for his life. This is at present thy case, therefore flee; they have utterly destroyed the foundations of truth and equity; what can righteousness now effect?"—*Clarke*. The position here is, then, that righteous-

ness has been unsuccessful, and the inference is that righteousness will be unsuccessful. "Thus wickedness seemed to be getting the upper hand to such a degree that the godly remnant (Isa. i. 9) felt themselves tempted to flee, as Lot was bidden to flee, from the city to the mountain."—*Kay*. "All is hopeless disorder and confusion."—*Perowne*. The representatives of moral ideas were false, the practice of righteousness ceased, the very principles of law and order were subverted, and there seemed no hope.

II. The constancy of the tried.

"In the Lord put I my trust" (ver. 1). "My feet are on the true rock, why should I look elsewhere for safety?"—*Perowne*. "How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? How can ye say?"—*Phillips*. Dark as the hour was, the Psalmist's resolution was unshaken. What were the sources of this sublime courage? 1. The *presence* of God. "The Lord is in His holy temple" (ver. 4). God may seem to have deserted the earth, but He has not. 2. The *majesty* of God. "The Lord's throne is in heaven" (ver. 4). Far above all human or devilish energy. The supreme power is moral. 3. The *knowledge* of God. "His eyes behold," &c. (ver. 4). "His is a fixed and penetrating look that sees into a thing to the foundation of its inmost nature. The mention of the eyelids is intentional. When we observe a thing closely or

ponder over it, we draw the eyelids together, in order that our vision may be more concentrated and direct, and become, as it were, one ray piercing through the object. Thus are men open to the all-seeing eyes, the all-searching looks of Jahve, the just and the unjust alike.”—*Delitzsch*. One of the Greeks said: “He is the best general who knows the most of the affairs of the enemy.” God knows His enemies, and the enemies of His people—all their secrets, subtleties, stratagems, and in due time He shall confound them. 4. The righteousness of God. God hates wickedness (ver. 5). “A cordial hatred.”—*Alexander*. “He hates the wicked with all the energy of His perfectly and essentially holy nature.”—*Delitzsch*.

Here the Psalmist rested; here we may rest. Truth may fail in the Church, righteousness in the State; the magistrate may cease to be just, the priest to be good, the king to be honourable; but God liveth, the Wise, the Just, the Good, and in Him we may rest.

III. The certainty of the triumph.

The wicked shall be destroyed with awful terrors (ver. 6), but the righteous shall triumph (ver. 7). “The upright shall behold His face.” “His unveiled countenance, no longer hidden behind deeds of strange providential discipline (xiii. 1), no longer making itself felt in a few straggling rays; but like ‘the sun in a morning without clouds.’”—*Kay*.

1. *All God's people may expect to be thus tried.* At one time or other our faith, principle, hope, will be thus severely tested. We must all be tried by fire.

2. Let us in such days *beware of the temporising policy of faint-hearted men.* “Flee like a bird to the mountain.”

“The advice here given, and which he repels, is that of timid and desponding friends, who would persuade him that all is lost, and that the highest wisdom is to yield to circumstances, and to seek safety, not in resistance, but in flight. But in fact the voice which thus speaks is the voice of the natural heart, of the selfish, and therefore shortsighted and cowardly instinct, which always asks first, not what is right, but what is safe. The advice may be well meant, but it is unworthy. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. But it is often a sorer trial for faith to have to withstand the pleadings of well-meaning friends than to arm itself against open enemies.”—*Perowne*.

3. *Let us trust confidently in God, and He shall make us to triumph.* Torstensohn, the great commander to whom Gustavus Adolphus transmitted the prosecution of the Thirty Years' War, was a man so shattered by disease that he had to be carried at the head of his forces in a litter. Yet no commander of his age was so resistless and terrible in his onset and so invariably victorious. Schiller has expressed his leading maxim in these words: *he never counted his enemies.* Let us not count our enemies, but trust our God, and we shall be more than conquerors. “Flee as sparrows to your mountain.”—*Phillips*. But, trusting in God, the sparrow becomes an eagle, mounting above the storm, and delighting itself in the eternal sunshine of the Father's face.

FORLORN HOPES.

(Verses 1-7.)

I. The hopes of the saint often appear forlorn hopes.

The Psalmist trusted in God, but to the timid and distrustful ones his hope was a wild, forlorn hope. A hoping against hope. Thus the hopes of the Christian often seem absurd in the eye of sense and the count of reason. 1. It is thus sometimes *in the troubles of life.* There are Egyptians behind, the sea before, and the believer's expectations

of deliverance seem most Utopian. 2. *Amid abounding and triumphant wickedness.* As in this psalm. “‘For the foundations are being overthrown,’ say the alarmed and timid ones. ‘He is as much in a minority now as he ever was. Had he not better leave the field of battle? Why struggle against (what men call) the inevitable course of events?’”—*Kay*. 3. *As to the entire sanctification of character.* How impos-

sible it seems that we should become entirely holy, and love God with all our heart! Will not the sky always recede as we approach it? 4. *At the grave.* How utterly improbable the grand hopes of the saint!

II. Hopes which appear forlorn hopes to the world have nevertheless strong foundations.

The timid felt that the foundations were being destroyed, all on which a rational confidence could be founded was giving way, and yet, as we see, the Psalmist's hope had a basis strong and deep. The *foundations* were gone. "It is not said, if the roof be ruinous, or if the side walls be shattered, but if the *foundations*."—*Fuller, quoted by Spurgeon.* Nothing for sense or reason was left. But there are foundations under

foundations, the eternal granite, and on this David built (ver. 4, 5). The power of God, the truth of God, the grace of God, the unchangeableness of God; here was the everlasting rock on which David rested his hopes. When the expectations of the saints seem most wild, yet do they rest more securely than the pillared firmament.

III. The forlorn hopes of the saints are destined to glorious realisation.

"Which hope maketh not ashamed." In deepest trouble He will deliver us, opening in the valley of Achor a door of salvation. Amid triumphant wickedness He vindicates the just, shattering the proud pottery with a rod of iron. He makes us without spot or wrinkle. He raises from the sepulchre to immortal glory and honour.

THE TACTICS OF THE TEMPTED.

(Verse 1.)

In this psalm we see David stand firm; he will not accept the counsel of his advisers to flee, but at another time he seems to have followed this advice.

Observe:

I. There are times when we ought to stand firm in the scenes of trial.

Such times are when—1. Such trials come in our *providential path*. 2. When our *testimony for God is specially needed*. 3. When the *cause of God imperatively demands our presence, &c., &c.*

II. There are times when we may lawfully withdraw from such scenes.

1. When *they do not seem to lie on our*

providential path. 2. When our *testimony has been faithfully given*. 3. When *God's cause would seem to be best served by our retirement, &c., &c.*

III. The standards by which our conduct should be regulated in the changing scenes of life.

Consult:

1. *The finger of God in Providence*. 2. *The Word of God*. 3. *The Spirit of God*.

"Oh, wouldst Thou, Lord, Thy servant guard,
'Gainst every known or secret foe;
A mind for all assaults prepared,
A sober, vigilant mind bestow,
Ever apprised of danger nigh,
And when to fight, and when to fly."

PSALM XII.

INTRODUCTION.

"This, according to the title, is one of David's psalms, but there is nothing in the circumstances, so far as we know them, of his history which can lead us to associate the psalm with any particular period. Tholuck thinks it is aimed at persons by whom David was surrounded in the court of Saul. But it is not one or two prominent individuals whose conduct forms the burden of the Psalmist's complaint. He is evidently smarting from the falseness and the hypocrisy of the time. The defection which he deplors is a national defection. Like Elijah in the desert, he feels himself alone. A taint has spread through society. Falsehood is everywhere, truth nowhere."—*Perowne.*

DARK AGES.

(Verses 1-8.)

We observe:

I. The golden age of a country

may be a "dark age" in the estimate of the saint.

"The time of David, incomparably the best age in the history of Israel, and yet, viewed in the light of the spirit of holiness, an age so radically corrupt."—*Delitzsch*. The age of David was in many respects the "golden age" of Israel, then it was great in literature, commerce, statesmanship, music, architecture, and arms. And yet David bemoans it, and sighs amid all its splendour. The true glory of a country is *moral*, and where the moral element is wanting, all other glories are dim. David felt that whilst palaces, people, chariots, gems, and gold, were on the increase, pious, honest, true-hearted men were on the decrease; nay, they seemed in danger of disappearing altogether, and he felt the gravity of the situation. David lamented over Jerusalem in the supreme hour of its material and political greatness; Paul overlooked the museums, pictures, statues, palaces of Athens, and "his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry;" and when we survey the magnificence of our country, we must weep to think of the atheism, the sin, the folly of the people. Philosophers, poets, commanders, artists, orators, statesmen, millionaires, do not make "a golden age," but the presence of many virtuous and godly men, and where these are wanting, colours, marbles, jewels, domes, and plumes, are but dust and ashes. The age that we call "golden," Heaven may call "dark;" the age that is written down in human histories as supremely august may be an age which angels record in Heaven's "Book of Lamentations."

We observe:

II. The faults with which a splendid civilisation may be chargeable.

Dr. John Brown says, "In observing the advances of commerce, we shall find that in its *first* stages it supplies mutual necessities, prevents mutual wants, extends mutual knowledge, eradicates mutual prejudice, and spreads mutual humanity. In its *middle* and more advanced period, it provides conveniences, increases numbers, gives birth to arts and science, creates equal laws, diffuses general plenty and general happiness. If we view it in its *third* and highest

stage, we shall see it change its nature and effects. It brings in superfluity and vast wealth, begets avarice, gross luxury, or effeminate refinement among the higher ranks, together with general loss of principle." The Jewish nation seemed to have entered on this latest stage. David charges his age—1. With the *lack of faithfulness*. "The faithful fail" (ver. 1). Honest and true-hearted men were not to be found. Is there not a counterpart to this in our day? The immorality of trade is constantly deplored, and the strange lack of conscientiousness in all classes of the community. 2. With *untruthfulness* (ver. 2). Insincerity and falsehood. "That which the writer especially laments is the prevailing untruthfulness,"—*Delitzsch*. Is not this a feature of our times? 3. *Pride*. "The tongue that speaketh proud things" (ver. 3). "Talking big."—*Horsley*. When did the tongue speak prouder things than now? 4. *Boasting* (ver. 4). "They declare themselves to be absolutely free, and exalted above all authority."—*Delitzsch*. Is not this pride, arrogance, defiance, a characteristic of our day? "The idea of the whole verse is, by our own lips and our tongues we can accomplish what we will."—*Alexander*. And is not this the idea of this generation? "Our puissance is our own: our own right hand shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try who is our equal."—*Paradise Lost*. 5. And the fifth verse seems to suggest that *goodness is treated with contempt*. Verses 5–8 "signify that at that time wickedness was the way to preferment, and that good men were the objects of persecution."—*Clarke*. "It is the fault of all high civilisations to think lightly of sin."—*Arnold*. And out of this scepticism, pride, and sensuality, come crimes of darkest complexion and largest proportion, peculiar to advanced civilisations. According to the height of the mountain is the depth of the valley; according to the intensity of the light is the depth of the shade; and according to the wealth, freedom, learning, splendour of a nation, are its crimes exaggerated and its vices crimson.

III. Duty of the Christian patriot.

1. To cry mightily to God against the prevailing wickedness. "Help, Lord!" (ver. 1). The effectual fervent prayer, &c.

2. To protest by word and act against this iniquity, as David did (ver. 3).

3. To rest in days of triumphant wickedness in the word and power of God (ver. 5, 6).

4. To claim God's promise, and keep himself unspotted from the world (ver. 7).

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A DIVINE REVELATION.

(Verse 6.)

We are taught here :

I. The grand characteristic of a Divine revelation.

"The words of the Lord are pure words" (ver. 6). The words of men, as the Psalmist has just been showing, are mixed and impure, but God's words are free from all base elements. *Ignorance, prejudice, falsehood, passion, insincerity, impurity*, debase the words of men, but not God's words. "Every word of God is pure." "His words are true and righteous altogether." The words of men are the smoky fires of earth; "the words of God" are the starry lights of heaven, pure and cloudless, and "which never lead astray."

We remark :

II. That the Scriptures which profess to be the words of the Lord have been tested, and their divinity established.

Where is this pure light? This Book claims to contain the words of God; its pretensions have been tried, and it comes forth as pure silver from the crucible.

1. It has been tried by *criticism*, its contents discussed and analysed, the genuineness, authenticity, canonicity, inspiration, of the various books discussed again and again. What is the result? Scores of critics—men most sincere, acute, learned, honest—have tried these pages, and approved them as the handwriting of God. And if you go to the different schools of sceptical criticism, each school will give you back some portion of the Book as authentic and Divine, and amongst them all you get back pretty nearly the whole Book.

2. It has been tried by *science*. Says one of our great scientists: "Science has established no results hostile to the evidences of Revelation." Neither the

stars nor the stones fight against it. Buckland, Sedgwick, Hugh Miller, the greatest of modern geologists; Brewster, the most famous of modern astronomers; Faraday, the most illustrious of modern chemists; these splendid names were Christian; these master-spirits of the scientific world loved this book, found no fault with it, died resting upon it their immortal hopes. There is not much the matter with Revelation where it touches Nature, or these masters would have found it out.

3. It has been tried by *experience*. Do the Scriptures accomplish what they promise in respect to man's condition and necessities? Christ said to the Jews, "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not." So we may say of the Scriptures. (1.) They have been tried in relation to man's *social* necessities. According to the sceptic, the Bible is false in fact, false in philosophy, false in morals, and it ought to make society selfish, anarchical, barbaric. But it does not. It does the very opposite. Our civilisation has its roots in the Bible; and if you take the Bible to a pagan land, it changes everything into purer and milder forms. It creates everywhere the highest intelligence, the largest liberty, the purest morality, the truest progress. (2.) They have been tried in relation to man's *moral and spiritual* necessities. It is just what we need. It gives us that light, pardon, liberty, purity, joy, for which we sigh. The Scriptures appeal to the multitudes whom it has saved from sin and misery, and exclaims, as Christ did, "The works that I do, they bear witness of Me." The Scriptures have been tried by suffering men, guilty men, dying men, unsophisticated men, men of loftiest

gifts, and they have found it just what they needed, all that they needed. "By its fruits we know it." Know it to be no poison tree to destroy; no barren tree to mock hungering men with leaves and blossoms; but a tree of life, whose fruits satisfy the longing soul, and whose very leaves are for the healing of the nations.

We observe finally:

III. The consequent preciousness of the Sacred Scriptures.

Precious as purified silver. Precious in life, in death. We value what is tried. In sickness, a tried medicine; in trouble, a tried friend; in bad weather, a tried ship, a tried captain, a tried anchor. Thank God! we have a tried religion. The Bible never failed our glorious religious ancestry, and it will never fail us.

PSALM XIII.

INTRODUCTION.

"In this psalm we see a servant of God, long and sorely tried by the persecutions of unrelenting enemies, and, as it seems to himself, forgotten and forsaken of God, pouring out the agony of his soul in prayer. It is a long and weary struggle, it is a daily and hourly martyrdom; and wrestling with his despair, he can but cry (like the souls under the altar, Rev. vi. 10), 'How long?' And then calmer words of prayer rise to his lips (ver. 3, 4); and at last Faith asserts her perfect victory (ver. 5). The rapid transition of feeling, from a depth of misery bordering on despair, to hope, and even joy, is very remarkable."—*Perowne*.

SOUL ECLIPSES.

(Verses 1-6.)

We assert:

I. The nature of such eclipses.

Ver. 1, 2. *Rylands*, commenting on this psalm, regards it as exclusively applicable to the Redeemer. "In addition to the sufferings which human nature is exposed to, Messiah, during His sojourn on earth, experienced a peculiar calamity in the hiding of God's face from Him." Then he goes on to say, "God never hides His face from the redeemed;" and speaks of "The ill effect of the doctrine that God hides His face from His people." Now, it is quite true that God never ceases to love His children, but still the people of God are sensible of eclipses of the soul, such as the Psalmist describes in this psalm. God has not really deserted His children, but it often *seems* as if He had. "It is true that God does not forget *any one*, yet it may be that, to the human spirit, it appears as if he were *forgotten* by God, and that the Holy One had *veiled* His countenance from him. Then he feels at once that he is *forsaken* by God, and that he is *weak* with reference to his enemies."—*Moll*. And whilst the Psalmist deploras the withdrawal of the Divine face, he yet recognises, in the same moment, that it is only a seeming withdrawal. *Phillips* renders

the passage, "How long wilt thou be apparently forgetful of my troubles, and withhold from me Thy assistance?" And *Delitzsch* explains: "The dejected heart thinks, God has forgotten me for ever; but the Spirit, which thrusts away this thought, changes it into a question which sets upon it the mark of a mere appearance, not a reality: How long shall it seem as though Thou forgettest me for ever? Faith holds fast the love that is behind the wrath; it sees in the display of anger only a self-masking of the loving countenance of the God of love, and longs for the time when this loving countenance shall be again unveiled to it." Thus, although God never really forsakes or neglects His people, it often seems as if He had done so. In providential matters, they fail to recognise His hand; His consolations cease in their spirit; and they are full of darkness and bitterness. And yet, as at midnight we know that the sun still lives, and will soon again shine on the earth; so in the saint's deepest darkness, his faith penetrates through the gloom, and awaits the shining of God's face.

Observe:

II. The cause of these eclipses.

1. Why does God thus appear to desert His people at all? Why does He

veil His hand and His face? The end of God's discipline with all His people is to make them feel their absolute dependence upon Himself. The aim of an earthly parent is to render the child independent, to teach it to live upon its own resources, to go by itself, to be sufficient in itself. God's aim is the opposite of this, to teach us that we are nothing, and can do nothing in ourselves, and that our sufficiency is of Himself. These eclipses teach us:

(1.) That God is the source of *happiness* (ver. 1). How deep the sorrow of the Psalmist's soul! When God hides His face, we feel that the fountain of life is stopped. No matter what may be left, "sorrow is in our heart daily." There is a flower which fades immediately a screen is interposed between it and the sun; and let God's face be hidden from us, and the soul sickens as a drooping flower.

(2.) That God is the source of *wisdom*. "How long shall I take counsel in my soul?" "David represents himself as meditating plan after plan."—*Speaker's Com.* "He appears to be devising many plans in vain, like an unsuccessful general in an army."—*Wordsworth*. "This strikingly describes the helpless embarrassment of the sufferer."—*Perowne*. When God hides His face, we know not what to do, how to act. We soon feel that He is the great Counsellor, and that we are painfully perplexed without His light.

(3.) That God is the source of *strength*. "How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" (ver. 2). David felt weak, and altogether at the mercy of his enemies. When the Spaniards had beaten the Mexicans in a great battle, the latter called in the assistance of their priests. The priests, after some consultation, said that the Spaniards were children of the sun; that they derived their strength from that luminary, and when his beams were withdrawn, their powers would also fail. They recommended a night attack, therefore, as one which afforded the best chance of success. As these Spaniards were supposed to draw their strength from the orb of day, so really does the saint draw his conquering strength from God; and

when he is deprived of the light of God's face his "enemies prevail against him."

(4.) God is the source of *life* (ver. 3). "Sleep an eternal sleep."—*Speaker's Com.* Without God we feel that we perish. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." Great lessons are taught us in life's dark hours. During eclipses, astronomers learn secrets of the heavens which they cannot penetrate in days of sunshine; and it is necessary sometimes that God should hide His face, so that we may see more clearly, and feel more deeply, these great truths and principles. "I know that, as night and shadows are good for flowers, and moonlight and dews are better than a continual sun, so is Christ's absence of special use, and that it hath some nourishing virtue in it, and giveth sap to humility, and putteth an edge on hunger, and furnisheth a fair field to faith to put forth itself, and to exercise its fingers in gripping it seeth not what."—*Rutherford, quoted by Spurgeon*.

2. Why does God hide His face so long? "How long," four times repeated. Is not the true answer, because we are so slow to learn the great truths which He designs to teach? We think that we have learned truths when they are not half-learned, and so God has to protract the eclipse. *Tholuck* well says: "That the length of trouble is harder to bear than the strength of it;" but it is only when long protracted that it leaves behind it the greater treasures.

III. The duty of the saints in these hours of darkness. Not discontent; not despair.

1. Wait in *faith*. "O Lord my God" (ver. 3). And there is faith throughout. He is in perplexity and trouble, but not in despair. In the dark he holds to God.

2. Wait in *prayer*. Mark how the Psalmist pleads (ver. 3). "It is well for those who, although in the greatest anxiety, are driven by the feeling that they are abandoned by God to seek the grace of God."—*Moll*. "Resolve never to be dumb while God is deaf."

3. Wait in *hope* (ver. 5, 6). *Coleridge* said of himself, that he was an inveterate hoper. So should it be with all the

people of God. Hope in God's mercy, and tune your harp for a song.

Believer, despair not; for if God seems to have forsaken you, He is still strengthening you. "As when the sun is eclipsed, though the earth wants the light thereof, yet not the influence thereof; so God's supporting grace is

ever with His deserted."—*Trapp*. And when the trial is over, your soul shall be deeper, brighter, more fruitful.

"You have been wretched; yet
The silver shower, whose reckless burden
weighs
Too heavily upon the lily's head,
Oft leaves a saving moisture at its root."
—WORDSWORTH.

THE CHEQUERED LIFE.

(Verses 1-6.)

What changes we witness in the Psalmist's life and experience! This psalm reflects as a mirror the changing conditions of his soul and history. In this little psalm David is seen as a fugitive and a conqueror, as despairing and triumphing, as weeping and singing. And it is largely thus with all the people of God.

Mark :

I. The vicissitudes of the outer life.

What contrasts of fortune you have in the life of David! A shepherd, a king; a king, a fugitive; and strange alternations of fortune throughout. Few lives present such marked contrasts as that of the Hebrew king, yet most lives know analogous variations. Our lives play up and down the scale between health and sickness, plenty and poverty, popularity and neglect, activity and solitude, fortune and disappointment.

II. The vicissitudes of the inner life.

In this psalm the writer passes from despair to exultation, from doubt to assurance, from lamentation to praise; and so might as easily pass back again, as indeed we see him do in other psalms. How *constant* the changes of the mood of the soul! We are ever changing from bright to dark, from low to high, from sweet to bitter, or the reverse. How *extreme* these changes of thought and feeling! We are conquerors, captives; kings, worms; strong as Samson, reeds shaken with the wind; singing at heaven's gate, weeping on ruin's brink.

How *rapid* these changes! The Christian soul is a microcosm, in which you may see in an hour hope, fear, joy, sorrow. In Iceland, we are told, contradictory elements and phenomena are strangely blended. Snow is often blackened with ashes, ashes are white-washed with snow; water flows under the lava, and there freezes and forms subterranean glaciers. As in this strange land fire and frost are thus fantastically mingled, so in the Christian soul do day and night, summer and winter, snow and harvest, strangely mix in perpetual flux.

III. The aim of this discipline.

To purify and perfect us. "Emptied from vessel to vessel," with each transition some of the dregs are to be removed, so that at length the wine of our life may run clear. The *sharp* and *sudden* contrasts are necessary to perfect us in the deep places of our nature. The Arabs say of the palm-tree that it must have "its feet in the water and its head in the fire." And so the soul needs strong contrasts of experience to ripen it in the things of God. The *continual variation* of experience is necessary to touch and perfect us on every side of our manifold nature. As with a thousand changes of sky, and wind, and atmosphere God ripens the fruit of the orchard, so with countless variations of thought and emotion does God ripen the Christian heart in His love and likeness.

JEALOUS FOR GOD.

(Verses 3, 4.)

The doctrine is taught here that God's honour is bound up with the deliverance of His people. David deprecated failure

in himself because God's honour and cause would suffer through it (ver. 4). "Moved from my steadfastness or firm-

ness, when I am overcome. Hitherto he had been able to hold out against them, now he began to despair, and to fear that they would accomplish their object by overcoming and subduing him. His ground of apprehension and of appeal was, that by his being vanquished the cause in which he was engaged would suffer, and that the enemies of religion would triumph.”—*Barnes*.

We learn here, then :

That God’s honour is bound up with the conduct of His people.

This should teach :

1. The *necessity of circumspection* in the saints. If we are moved, God’s cause is injured and His name profaned. “And certainly it should be a powerful motive to restrain us from transgression, when we consider that as the conversion of a sinner brings glory to God, and causes joy among the angels of heaven, so the fall of a believer disgraces the Gospel of Jesus, opens the mouths of the adversaries, and would produce joy, if such a thing could be, in hell itself.”—*Horne*. “Oh, what desolation is made by

the fall of a righteous soul! Itself covered with darkness and desolation, infidels filled with scoffing, the Church clad in mourning, the Spirit of God grieved, and Jesus crucified afresh, and put to an open shame! O God! save the pious reader from such wreck and ruin!”—*Clarke*.

2. The *strong ground of a believer’s confidence*. God will not permit us to be moved if we are faithful, for this would dishonour Himself and His kingdom. What a plea in prayer!

“Ah! suffer not my foe to boast
His victory o’er a child of Thine,
Nor let the proud Philistines’ host
In Satan’s hellish triumph join.

“Will they not charge my fall on Thee?
Will they not dare my God to blame?
My God, forbid the blasphemy!
Be jealous for Thy glorious name!”

—WESLEY.

3. A warning to *persecutors*. Persecuting saints, they aim a blow at God. “As unskilful hunters shooting at wild beasts do sometimes kill a man, so persecutors, shooting at saints, hit Christ, reproach Him.”—*Trapp*.

PSALM XIV.

INTRODUCTION.

“It does not appear upon what occasion David composed this psalm. The revolt of Israel in Absalom’s rebellion is by most writers pitched upon as the subject of it. But be this as it may, the expressions are general, and evidently designed to extend beyond a private interpretation. And accordingly, the apostle (Rom. iii. 10, &c.) produces some passages from it to evince the apostasy of both Jews and Gentiles from their King and their God, and to prove them to be all under sin. In this light, therefore, we are to consider it, as characterising the principles and practices of those who oppose the Gospel of Christ in all ages.”—*Horne*.

THE IMMORALITY OF ATHEISM.

(Verses 1-3.)

I. It is immoral in its principle.

It is the denial of the existence, an ignoring of the rights, of the Absolute and Eternal King. Sceptics often talk of the rights of man; but they end with the essential immorality of denying the crown rights of God. He made us; He made the world, and all that is in it; and to deny His existence and to ignore His government is profoundest immorality. “Sin, if unchecked, would go to the extinction of all being, and of God Himself. There is no doubt that all sin designs deicide. All sin is directed against universal being. It is primarily

against God, inferentially against all being. All transgression is ambitious, and, if it could succeed, it would scale the universe and dethrone its Monarch.”—*Duncan*. Atheism is the essence of ingratitude, injustice, lying, pride, hatred, and selfishness.

II. It is immoral in its origin.

“They are corrupt.” It does not spring from a pure and honest intellect, which finds itself perplexed by a problem too great for it, but from a proud and corrupt heart. “Passion, not reason, generates atheism. Sin suggests a dislike of Providence, and reason is

then marshalled to drive Him out of our view.”—*Rylands*. “Their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. i. 21). The child recognises God, but, giving place for long years to worldliness and sin, the man sinks into practical atheism. He lives so long without God in the world, that at last he ventures to think that there is no God. And so a nation as it increases in wealth, and luxury, and power, becomes self-sufficient; and the outcome of this is a general prevalence of speculative and practical atheism. We wrong God, and then we forget Him; we forget Him, and then we deny Him.

III. It is immoral in its consequences.

Sin leads to scepticism, and scepticism to sin. With the denial of God we lose the principle of moral life and beauty. 1. *Personally* we become “corrupt.” Belief in God is the salt of human nature, and when that has gone the whole man rapidly corrupts. 2. And *our works* become “abominable.” He who has smothered in his heart the knowledge of God, has lost the vital principle of health, beauty, life, and usefulness. “*The fool*, is a term in

Scripture signifying a wicked man; the word signifies the extinction of life in men, animals, and plants; so the word is taken Isaiah xl. 7, ‘The flower fadeth;’ a plant that hath lost all that juice that made it lovely and useful. So a fool is one that hath lost his wisdom and right notion of God and divine things, which were communicated to man by creation; one dead in sin.”—*Charnock*. Atheism cannot create a noble manhood. It creates a fool. Religion and right reason gone, natural principles extinct, what can you have but a distorted and ignoble humanity? Atheism cannot create a noble nation. Without God, man rots; without God, society rots. Atheism is the greatest immorality. “Folly is a term employed in Hebrew to signify the greatest possible degree of guilt.”—*French*. “The Psalmist makes this prominent as the very extreme and depth of human depravity, that there can be among men those who deny the existence of a God.”—*Delitzsch*. It is the source of all immoralities; and God will punish it with great retribution (ver. 5).

THE BANE AND THE ANTIDOTE.

(Verses 1-7.)

Observe :

I. The corruption of the race.

Mark :

1. This corruption is *universal* (ver. 2). God is represented, in the history of the Flood, as looking down from the windows of heaven upon mankind to see if there were any who sought Him. And what is the result of this search? We have it in the 3d verse. “Every one hath turned away; or, more emphatically, the whole universe hath turned away.”—*Phillips*. “The universality of corruption is expressed in as strong terms as possible; what the Psalmist says applies primarily to Israel, his immediate neighbours, but at the same time to the heathen, as is self-evident. What is lamented is neither the pseudo-Israelitish corruption in particular, nor that of the heathen, but the universal corruption of man, which prevails not less in Israel than in the heathen world.”

—*Delitzsch*. “Total and universal corruption could not be more clearly expressed than by this accumulation of the strongest terms, in which, as Luther well observes, the Psalmist, not content with saying *all*, adds *together*, and then negatively, *no not one*. It is plain that he had no limitation or exception in his mind, but intended to describe the natural condition of *all men*, in the widest and most unrestricted sense. *The whole*, not merely *all* the individuals as such, but the entire race as a totality or ideal person.”—*Alexander*. It is true that in the 5th verse the Psalmist speaks of “the generation of the righteous,” but this is not to be regarded as any limitation of his dark judgment of the condition of man. “The recognition of a *righteous generation* on earth does not contradict the statement of the total corruption of the children of Adam, embracing all without exception.”

For the righteous generation consists not of a little band of men who have remained exempt from sin and its corruption, whom God has somehow overlooked, when He looked about, because they stood in a corner, or because they are not brought into consideration on account of their small number in comparison with the awful corruption of the masses. To this class belong rather those men in the midst of the generation of the children of Adam who have been *born again as children of God* of incorruptible seed, who by this *change* of their inborn nature form a peculiar class in the midst of the generation of men, and afford the seed of regeneration for the entire people.”—*Moll.* The Psalmist pictures all men everywhere as corrupt, and thus the apostle interprets him (Rom. iii. 10–12).

Mark :

2. This corruption is *thorough*. Not only are all corrupt, but all are *entirely* so. “They are altogether filthy.” The *nature* is depraved. “They are corrupt.” The “heart,” the inmost personality, is corrupt, and thus all the powers and faculties of the man are defiled. “The source of all his movements, the affections and heart, are polluted; the waters are poisoned at the spring.”—*Rylands.* The *life* is depraved. (1.) Many have done “*abominable works*.” “When men begin with renouncing the Most High God, who shall tell where they will end? Observe the state of the world before the Flood, as portrayed in Genesis vi. 12, and remember that human nature is unchanged. He who would see a terrible photograph of the world without God must read that most painful of all inspired Scriptures, the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Things loathsome to God and man are sweet to some palates.”—*Spurgeon.* (2.) And if men have not done “*abominable works*,” there is “*none that doeth good*.” “Do any object that, beyond the circle of the righteous, there is much virtue to be found, much civil righteousness, much beautiful natural affection? The natural virtues that still adorn the world and claim the admiration of men

are vitated before God by this, that there is no regard in them to His will.”—*Binnie.* They “come short of the glory of God.”

3. This corruption is *profound*. It is not a taint, but a deep disease. It is deeply “corrupted,” *i.e.*, become putrid. It is a deep malignity of nature. In Psalm viii., we have the picture of the *ideal* man, the *original* man, the *possible* man; here, alas! we have a sorrowful picture of the *actual* man. The Bible recognises our intrinsic grandeur, it recognises our deep degradation.

Observe :

II. The Deliverer of the race.

Ver. 7. “The prayer is, in a subordinate sense, that God would raise up a reformer. But the true and ultimate spirit of the prayer is for the speedy advent of Christ (Isa. lix. 20; Rom. xi. 26; Jer. xiv. 8). To whom could the prophets appeal in the time of trouble but to the only Hope of Zion? (Ps. liii.).” —*Sutcliffe.*

1. The world cannot be renewed by *philosophy*. “Philosophy may adorn, but it is impotent to regenerate human nature.”—*Lecky.* 2. Nor by *education*. The fault is in the heart, not the head; it is moral, not intellectual. “The word chosen by David in the 1st verse, *nabal, fool*, means imbecile, a vapid, worn-out fool, one whose heart and understanding are degraded, incapable of seeing truth. It is a word never used of mere natural obtuseness, but of spiritual corruption.”—*Speaker's Com.*

3. Nor by *institutions*. No change of external relations will bring *true* deliverance. Politics, commerce, manners, whatever springs from man, is itself imperfect and tainted; and to attempt to make a perfect man by human institutions is like a man attempting to clean his face with a dirty duster. 4. Nor is there *any restorative principle in human nature*. “At last man will be healed, for human nature has the power to recover from its wounds by means of a certain inward power.”—*Goethe.* This is not true: there is no such power. *The hope of the world is in the Church of Christ.* Out of Zion comes the Deliverer; out of the Christian Church come

those blessings which shall make society pure and free. And oh ! what joy shall there be everywhere when Christ breaks

the tyranny of sin, and gives to the world the freedom and pleasures of righteousness !

CONSCIENCE.

(Verses 4-6.)

We have here :

I. Conscience informed.

"Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" (ver. 4). "Have they no conscience."—*Delitzsch*. "Have they no experience."—*Moll*. Now it is quite true that the workers of iniquity seem like brute beasts, as if they had no common sense, no conscience ; but they had these gifts, and it is this fact which renders their conduct so dark.

1. We sin against *understanding*. Our reason protests against sin. 2. We sin against *conscience*. Our moral sense echoes the words and thunders of Sinai, and protests against transgression. 3. We sin against *experience*. Our history shows how all that is desirable and honourable lies in the path of obedience, and how paths of transgression are paths of misery and shame. This constitutes the enormity of sin : we know our duty to God and man. We have moral ideas and sensibilities. Sin is not a mistake, not a misfortune, but a crime.

II. Conscience asleep. 1. Asleep as to *men*. "Who eat up My people as they eat bread" (ver. 4). That is, they commit the greatest excesses and injustice without the smallest compunction. In wronging the weak, the good, the poor, "they think that they are not doing anything more sinful,—indeed, rather what is justifiable, irreproachable,

and lawful to them,—than when they are eating bread."—*Hengstenberg*. "The light that is in them is darkness." 2. Asleep as to *God*. "And call not upon the Lord" (ver. 4). They have forgotten God. Practically they say, "There is no God." Thus men stifle their moral sense and live neither fearing God nor regarding man.

III. Conscience aroused (ver. 5). "When Jehovah thus bursts forth in scorn, His word, which never fails in its working, smites down these brutish men, who are without knowledge and conscience."—*Delitzsch*. "When God's long-suffering changes into wrath, terror at His judgment seizes them, and they tremble through and through."—*Delitzsch*. "Suddenly, while they were in complete security (liii. 6), terror lays hold on them."—*Kay*. As ver. 6 intimates, the sceptical worldlings had laughed at the piety of the meek. "You pour contempt on the poor man's resolve, because the Lord is his refuge, you must needs deride this as arrant folly,—to trust in an unseen God !"—*Kay*. But they awake to find that "God is in the generation of the righteous ;" all is true that the righteous held, and the angry God is ready to avenge Himself on the proud sinner. Let us fly to the great Deliverer of Zion. He can give the guilty conscience peace, and wash away its stains.

PSALM XV.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm teaches the necessity of moral purity as a condition of the Divine protection. It first propounds the question who shall be admitted to God's household, and the privileges of its inmates (ver. 1). This is answered positively (ver. 2), and negatively (ver. 3); then positively again (ver. 4), and negatively (ver. 5). The last clause of the last verse winds up by declaring, that the character just described shall experience the protection tacitly referred to in the first verse."—*Alexander*.

THE PSALM OF LIFE.

We observe :

I. The question which the Psalmist proposes.

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle?" &c. (ver. 1). "Who may hope for acceptance as a worshipper

of Jehovah?"—*French*. "Tabernacle and hill together signify the earthly residence of God. It is a figure for intimate communion with Jehovah, and participation of His favour."—*Alexander*.

Who shall enjoy Thy communion, Thy friendship, Thy protection? Who shall commune with Thee on earth? Who shall dwell with Thee in heaven?

This is the *grand question* of life. Who shall enjoy the Divine favour and protection, now and for ever? surely this is the question of first and supreme importance! It is a question which should be urged before God with a *personal* interest and anxiety. Not "are there many that be saved?" but, "what shall *I* do to inherit eternal life?"

We notice:

II. The comprehensive answer which is given to the great question.

Ver. 2-5. Admission to the Divine presence and eternal joy does not turn: (1.) On what is *national*. It is not the privilege of Jew or Gentile, as such. (2.) On what is *physical*. We do not enter heaven on the ground of affliction. Those before the throne came out of great tribulation, but that was not the reason of their glorification. (3.) On what is *social*. Dives is not rejected because he is rich; Lazarus is not accepted because he is poor. (4.) On what is *educational*. Some of our philosophers have lately ventured on the theory, that if men achieve a certain mental development, they will become immortal; but lacking this culture, they are doomed to extinction at death. The grand test is not educational. (5.) On what is *ecclesiastical*. The whole point of this psalm is directed against this idea. *Horsley* heads the psalm: "True godliness described as distinct from the ritual." "With regard to that part of the hierarchical theory which makes membership in the visible Church identical, for all practical purposes, with membership in the Church invisible, it is tacitly refuted in places without number. The true citizen of Zion is "the man that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not

lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully; he shall receive the blessing from the Lord. This is the generation of them that seek Him." There is an all-important distinction between the visible and invisible Church; the true Church and the professing Church, although they are so closely connected that the eye of man cannot draw a line of separation between them, are by no means coincident. "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. ii. 28, 29)."—*Binnie*. But (6.) The whole question of our acceptance with God, and heirship of immortality, turns on *character*. *Holiness* is the grand requirement. "In the foregoing psalm David had lifted up his eyes to Zion, the hill of God, where the ark of His presence was. He was mindful of the holiness required of all who are admitted to its neighbourhood. How much more is this true of the heavenly Zion, to which David raises his eyes and heart from the earthly citadel."—*Wordsworth*. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The righteousness required by God is—1. *Perfect*. "He that walketh uprightly," *i.e.*, *perfectly* (ver. 2). "One who walks uprightness, *i.e.*, one who makes uprightness his way, his mode of action."—*Delitzsch*. The law of God requires perfection of spirit and life. God says to us all, as to Abram, "Walk thou before me, and be thou perfect." 2. *Practical*. "*Worketh* righteousness." "The piety delineated in the Psalter, although it soars to heaven and its life is hid in God, never omits the assiduous cultivation of the lowly duties of everyday morality. The Church has always been infested with a sort of people whose religion is all expended on the first table of the laws; who, along with a great show of contrition, and faith, and spiritual joy, and delight in God's worship, are ill-natured in the domestic circle, censorious and unfriendly neighbours, unsafe men to deal with in business. The psalms do full justice to the

perfect law of God in this matter. Whatever may be the quarter whence the antinomian perversion of the Gospel may derive its aliment, certainly it is not from the songs of Zion. What a fine portrait this 15th Psalm, for example, draws of the godly man ! He loves God's tabernacle and holy hill ;—his heart is there. And when he goes out into the world, he does not leave his religion behind. He shows the influence of the fear of God in all he does. His tongue utters no malice. He is a man of his word. He will not make gain of his neighbour's necessity ; nor will he, for any consideration, oppose the cause of one whom he knows to be innocent. These are the true fruits of faith unfeigned. He that *doeth* these things shall never be moved.”—*Binnie*. “Thus, in heart, in tongue, in actions, in his conduct as a member of society, he is alike free from reproach. Such is the figure of stainless honour drawn by the pen of a Jewish poet. Christian chivalry has not dreamed of a brighter. We have need often and seriously to ponder it. For it shows us that faith in God and spotless integrity may not be sundered ; that religion does not veil or excuse petty dishonesties ; that love to God is only then worthy the name when it is the life and bond of every social

virtue. Each line is, as it were, a touchstone to which we should bring ourselves. To speak truth in the heart—to take up no reproach against a neighbour—would not the Christian man be perfect of whom this could be said?”—*Perowne*. 3. *Spiritual*. “Speaketh the truth in his heart” (ver. 2). “The characterising of the outward walk and action is followed in verse 2, by the characterising of the inward nature.”—*Delitzsch*. “This speaking truth qualifies not merely what precedes, but the whole description, as of one who sincerely and internally, as well as outwardly, leads a blameless life by doing right and speaking truth.”—*Alexander*. Out of a true and spiritual heart spring these practical graces. It will not do to be merely moral, or only professedly religious. “God only admitteth such as are righteously religious, and religiously righteous.”—*Trapp*. We must show our faith by our works, and our works must be spiritualised by our faith. “Walk in the heaven of the promise, but in the earth of the law ; that in respect of believing, this of obeying.”—*Luther*.

How impossible it is to realise this righteousness, so perfect, so profound, so universal, except by virtue of the grace and strength of Jesus Christ !

EVANGELICAL MORALITY.

(Verses 1-6.)

I. Its comprehensiveness (ver. 2). “*Walking*,” the habitual course of life must be right. “*Working*,” all the action must be right. “*Speaking*,” all the conversation must be truth and uprightness. The true Christian seeks to be free from evil habits, evil acts, evil words. He is required here to be free from insincerity, censoriousness, pride, untruthfulness, covetousness, injustice. In verse 2, he is required to be blameless *personally*. In verse 3, he must be a good *neighbour*. In verse 4, a true *friend*. Standing faithfully to the meritorious. In verses 4, 5, an *honest merchant* ; he “that sweareth,” &c. A man of his word. A *just merchant*. “*Usury*.” Not taking

advantage of any man. In verse 5, an upright *magistrate*. “Nor taketh reward,” &c. Christian morality covers the whole ground of character and life. Feet, hands, heart, tongue, eyes, influence, money, social rank and power, all are required by this psalm to be consecrated and pure.

II. Its loftiness. Coarse, gross sins are not referred to here. It is assumed that they must be laid aside. No fornicator, thief, drunkard, liar, murderer, shall enter the kingdom of God. This is taken as so evident, that such offences are not named. But the standard is a very exalted one. These various crimes in more subtle forms are seized upon and forbidden. We must not only be

free from gross sins, but walk *perfectly*; not only abstain from falsehood, but speak the truth in our heart; not only abstain from calumny, but from repeating reflective reports; not only abstain from perjury, but cherish a high sensitiveness as to our promise; not only abstain from tyranny and pride, but cherish a deep humility; not only not injure others, but esteem them better than ourselves; not only not steal, but not take advantage of any one in the way of trade; not only not murder, but love our brother. All this, and much more than this, is taught in the various words and phrases of this psalm. Thus, in the New Testament (1 Cor. xiii.), the apostle does not speak of Christian love as preserving from gross vices, but, far beyond this, producing clusters of graces, rare, lofty, delicate, divine.

How much superior is the morality of the Gospel to mere good manners,

to a mere natural amiability, to a commercial utilitarian morality!

III. Its inspiration (ver. 1). "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?" The recognition of God is its source and strength. In God we find the grand example of this holiness: from Him comes the strength by which we attain supernal goodness. A comprehensive, lofty morality, like that insisted upon in this psalm, is altogether beyond the reach of nature. It is only as we admire and love God, and thirst to be like Him, and seek a fitness for His eternal kingdom, that we are able to reach the full, deep, transcendent morality pictured in this psalm.

IV. Its recompense (ver. 5). "He that doeth these things shall never be moved." "He stands fast, being upheld by Jehovah, hidden in His fellowship; nothing from without, no misfortune, can cause his overthrow."—*Delitzsch*.

THE LAW OF THE LIP.

(Verse 3.)

I. The nature of slander. 1. The *origination* of an evil report concerning our neighbours. "He that backbiteth with his tongue." 2. The *circulation* of an evil report invented by others. "Nor taketh up a reproach." The "calumniator takes up the lie, and circulates it."—*Speaker's Com.* "The verb seems strictly to denote the act of busy or officious tale-bearing."—*Alexander*. 3. The *listening* to such a report. Giving it the sanction of our ear. The original may be translated "endureth;" implying that it is a sin to endure or tolerate tale-bearers. "The tale-bearer carrieth the devil in his tongue; the tale-hearer in his ear."—*Trapp*. We are not "to do evil to our neighbour" in any wise.

II. The evil of slander. What mighty unhappiness it causeth! 1. It demoralises the slanderer. 2. It demoralises the person to whom the slander is related. 3. It wrongs the party slandered. "'Show that man out!' we should say of a drunkard; yet it is very questionable if his unmannerly behaviour will do us so much mischief as the tale-bearer's insinuating story. 'Call for a

policeman!' we say if we see a thief at his business; ought we to feel no indignation when we hear a gossip at her work? Mad dog! mad dog!! is a terrible hue and cry, but there are few curs whose bite is so dangerous as a busybody's tongue. Fire! fire!! is an alarming note, but the tale-bearer's tongue is set on fire of hell, and those who indulge it had better mend their manners, or they may find that there is fire in hell for unbridled tongues."—*Spurgeon*.

III. The cure for slander. It is a most difficult thing to rule the tongue, and refrain from evil-speaking. There is a story told of an illiterate old monk named Pambos. Being unable to read, he came to some one to be taught a psalm. Having learnt the single verse, "I said I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue," he went away, saying that was enough if it were practically acquired. When asked six months and again many years after, why he did not come to learn another verse, he answered that he had never been able truly to master this. What is the grand cure for all sins of the lip?

He "*speaketh the truth in his heart.*" "It is not falsehood and deceit that he thinks and plans inwardly, but truth."—*Delitzsch.* "Whose heart-converse is' truthful;—who in that hidden council-chamber of the soul holds no parley with what is false."—*Kay.* The heart must be changed, enlightened, exalted. Out of a pure fountain flows a pure stream.

"What ! never speak one evil word,
Or rash, or idle, or unkind !
Oh, how shall I, most gracious Lord,
This mark of true perfection find ?

"Forgive, and make my nature whole ;
My inbred malady remove ;
To perfect health restore my soul,—
To perfect holiness and love."

PSALM XVI.

INTRODUCTION.

"The first clause contains in germ the thought of the entire psalm, namely, that the pious man has always protection with God against all his enemies. From this assurance arises the cry of prayer (ver. 1), whose form shows the experience of pressing danger, but immediately passes over into the confession of the way in which the Psalmist proposes to act in consequence of his relation to God (ver. 2) and to His people (ver. 3). In ver. 4 the Psalmist maintains himself against the worshippers of idols. In ver. 5, 6 we have a description of the good chosen in God, and of the happiness allotted on account of this. It then turns, praising Jehovah (ver. 7), to testify of the position of the Psalmist established in Him (ver. 8), and rises from the assurance of this communion with God, not only to a jubilant declaration of present Divine protection (ver. 9), but in prophetic inspiration to a prophetic promise of the everlasting enjoyment of salvation (ver. 10, 11)."—*Moll.* "The psalm is appropriate to the whole class of pious sufferers, of which Christ is the most illustrious representative. It is only in Him, therefore, that some parts of it can be said to have received their highest and complete fulfilment."—*Alexander.*

FAITH IN GOD.

(Verses 1, 2.)

The Psalmist in a time of trial thus expresses his confidence in God. This faith in God is :

I. Personal. "Preserve *me*, O God' (ver. 1). "Thou art *my* Lord" (ver. 2). It was an individualising faith. Just as Adam sought to hide himself amid the trees of the garden, so do we imagine ourselves hidden in the multitude. Let us seek to realise our needful personality in the sight of God. 1. Let us realise Him as *my* Creator. Not as creating merely all worlds and all nations, but as specially forming *me*, and giving to me a singular and independent spirit. Think not only of the ocean of humanity as flowing from His creative hand ; but remember that the dewdrop, I, Me, was the distinct creation of His almighty power and love. 2. As *my* Ruler. Philosophy has an utter contempt for individuals—it concerns itself with masses, multitudes, ages—God rules the universe. It must contemplate all on the sublime scale. We are often told that the danger of society in these days is in centralisation ;

certainly the danger in our philosophy is in aggregation. We are, in opposition to this, to believe in God, as *my* Ruler and *my* King. 3. As *my* Saviour. We are not to look on the Gospel message as a public proclamation on the street wall, but as an autograph letter from our clement King, addressed with our name, and left by the postman at our door. This faith in God is :

II. Absolute. "*In Thee* do I trust" (ver. 1).

1. He trusts in God *only*. In the 2d verse, he acknowledges God as His sovereign Lord. "Thou art *my* Lord," "My supreme Lord ;—who hast an absolute right to all my services."—*Kay.* And in the 4th verse, he repudiates all other gods. He rests his whole weight on God, placing no expectations elsewhere. "God is recognised as the only source of individual enjoyment."—*Alexander.* 2. He trusts in God for *all*. "My goodness extendeth not to thee" (ver. 2). "I have no good beyond thee." "This is the one grand thought

which stamps the psalm, 'Thou, O Lord, art my portion, my help, my joy, my all in all.'—*Perowne*. What the pagans vainly sought for in many gods, the Psalmist found in One; what the worldling vainly seeks for in many objects, the believer exults to find in the favour of God.

This faith is :

III. Habitual. "Do I put my trust." Or, "For I have trusted in Thee." "This is no new or sudden act, but one performed already. He not only *trusts* in God at present, but *has trusted* Him before. The recognition of God was not a mere momentary act, but a habitual affection of the mind."—*Alexander*. There is such a thing as crying to God in a moment of trouble or danger, and neglecting Him in days of peace. A true faith is a constant faith. "I have set the Lord always before me" (ver. 8). 1. God will honour faith like this in the hour of *danger*. During the negro rebellion Mr. Francis Gardiner was travelling from one town to another, in Jamaica, in a gig. Some advised him to take firearms to protect himself, and he assented. He went a little way with the firearms, but soon returned, saying, "I am not comfortable with them:" and once more went on his journey without them. Soon he fell among a party of negroes, who stopped his horse. One said, "He is a missionary;" but the others said, "No, he is a Government

spy." Then they said, "If he be a Government spy he will have firearms; if a missionary, he will have no arms." He was searched, and no firearms being found upon him, the negroes, instead of murdering him, led him safely on his journey. We generally have too much policy and too little faith. 2. Such faith will be honoured in the hour of *trial*. The world's refuges fail just when they are most needed, but they who hide themselves in God shall not be confounded. Dr. Livingstone tells us of an African tree. "The Mopané-tree is pretty to look at in the bright sunshine of early morning, but the leaves hang perpendicularly as the sun rises high, and afford little or no shade through the day." True image of worldly shelters and helpers! They look promising enough in the bright sunshine of the morning, in health, wealth, popularity; but, alas! when the burning heat of trial and trouble come, they fail, and the hot beams beat on our naked head! The Psalmist here takes God for his hiding-place, and he is safe and singing. 3. Such faith will be honoured in the hour of *death*. Jordan is deeper or shallower "according to our faith in the King of the place." David has trusted in God, and, in presence of death and the grave, he shouts like a conqueror (ver. 9-11). If we emulate his faith, we shall know his triumph.

THE PEERAGE OF HEAVEN.

(Verse 3.)

Alexander translates this verse: "As to the saints who are in the land, they are the nobles in whom is all my delight." Thus the people of God are designated as peers, a divine aristocracy.

We observe :

I. Their patent of nobility. By what right are they called "nobles"? They are the children of the King. They have been begotten again to a Divine and immortal inheritance. And this fact they reveal—1. By the *dignity* of their *character*. They show their lofty birth by their purity and sublimity of character and conduct. Their

glory is not in purple, stars, and coronets, but in splendid moral qualities. "The *excellent*, properly the *outwardly* illustrious; the root-meaning is that of glitter, splendour, &c. It contains the idea of a moral as well as of a merely outward glory."—*Perowne*. 2. By the *elevation* of their *life*. In all things they seek to act from great motives, by great principles, to great ends. One of our earls was derided because, when he was made knight of the garter, he put the garter on all his shovels, wheelbarrows, and pickaxes. But the moral noble puts the sign of his estate on all

that he has, on all that he does, down to the commonest and most trifling things. In "that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts" (Zech. xiv. 20, 21). Thus are they real nobles, "men of whom the world is not worthy." "Some think rich men to be excellent, some think learned men to be excellent, some count men in authority so to be; but here we are taught that those men are *excellent* who are sanctified by God's graces." — *Greenham*. "The title of 'His Excellency' more properly belongs to the meanest saint than to the greatest governor. The true aristocracy are believers in Jesus. They are the only Right Honourables. Stars and garters are poor distinctions compared with the graces of the Spirit." — *Spurgeon*.

Observe :

II. Their oath of fealty. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord" (ver. 2). He recalls his covenant with God. As the new-made peer swears fidelity to his king, so have the saints vowed to be the Lord's. Let us remember this: 1. In the hour of danger to our comfort. We are God's sworn ones, and shall He not ever shelter and save us? 2. In the hour of temptation to our caution. When allurements are held out to us to worldliness and sin, remember, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord;" "The vows of God are upon us." In the clearest, loftiest, most solemn moments of life, again and again have we pledged ourselves to God; let us not in a moment of excitement or weakness forget the glorious oath. The righteous man "sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not;" surely we shall change not wherein we have sworn to our eternal advantage.

"High Heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

Observe :

III. Their bond of unity. What is the *esprit de corps*? (ver. 3). "The meaning of this verse is, that the Psalmist's recognition of Jehovah as the Lord, and as the only source of happiness, is not peculiar to himself, but common to the whole body of the *saints* or *holy ones*, in whose society he delighted." — *Alexander*. What is expressed here "is love to God and love to His saints." — *Delitzsch*. This is the spirit, the bond of union.

1. *Love to God*. This is the grand basis of their oneness, trust in God, love to God. "Where any two souls cry out simultaneously, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' the portion wall is broken down, and they are bound together more firmly by a sigh than by the loftiest formulas. They but hinder real union prevailing among us who are always haggling about words and isolated expressions." — *Büchsel*. A common faith in God is the innermost evangelical alliance.

2. *Love to God's people*. "In whom is all my delight" (ver. 3). "In God's land there are others who, like David, cleave to God, and with these he claims fellowship." — *Perowne*. Where there is a true love to God, there will be a living delight in His people.

IV. Their uncompromising loyalty (ver. 4). Their sorrows shall be multiplied, "who wed themselves to another god." — *Kay*. "Not idols merely, but any created object of supreme affection." — *Alexander*. The Psalmist declares that he will not join in their impious services, nor even name the names of their divinities. He will have no complicity with such whatever. "It was a great consolation that, during his exile, being much with heathens, he had remained true to his God. He had not lifted up his hand to Dagon while protected in Philistia. He had not pronounced the name of an idol, which Moses had forbidden the Jews to do, nor had he attended the bloody altar of Moloch. Come then to this school, all ye lukewarm, ye degenerate souls, who trim between the world and the Church. It is of small moment to you to protract the hour of returning from market, or with whom you take the cheerful glass.

Take care what you do : you may go a step too far."—*Sutcliffe*.

Observe :

V. Their great inheritance (ver. 5, 6). "The idea is, that in the Lord the Psalmist has all that he can wish or hope for."—*Alexander*. And it is a secure and everlasting portion.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS.

(Verses 5, 6.)

I. Their inheritance is Divine.

1. *God Himself*. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup" (ver. 5). "There is an allusion, probably, to the division of the land of Canaan among the tribes, no part of which was assigned to the tribe of Levi, because, as was expressly declared, Jehovah would be their portion or share (Num. xviii. 20), and the gifts consecrated to Jehovah the provision for their support. That which was true nationally of Levi was true in its deepest spiritual import of every believing Israelite. 'What must not he possess,' says Savonarola, 'who possesses the Possessor of all?'"—*Peronne*. "In the text all Israel is viewed as a 'spiritual priesthood;' who, wholly devoted to God, had Him for their everlasting reward."—*Kay*. 2. And *God alone* is the portion of His people. They ask for nothing beyond Him. *Moll* renders the 2d verse of this Psalm; "My happiness is not added to Thee. Nothing that must be added to Thee makes me happy, but Thou alone, giving exclusive and full satisfaction. Compare the analogous thought and expression, Ps. lxxiii. 25." Yet, 3. The saints *have everything in God*. "The heritage or portion thus described is God Himself, but considered as including all desirable possessions."—*Alexander*. We have all gifts in the Giver. The "lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." The blessing of God makes all places bright and happy; or, as some translate, in pleasant things. "It signifies both pleasant circumstances, and a pleasant locality."—*Delitzsch*. The blessing of God imparts a profound charm and significance to all our possessions, re-

The old saying declares, "Carry great ensigns and you shall be great." The believer carries "great ensigns"—a great name, a great service, a great king, a great future. May "all that name the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

lationships, circumstances. And finally, the blessing of God makes all seasons bright. In the 7th verse, the night seasons are full of holy and happy communings. God's smile makes all seasons bright, even the darkest. "If I say, The darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me." All places, all things, all seasons, "all are yours."

This inheritance :

II. Is secure. "Thou maintainest my lot" (ver. 5). "Nor is this comparison unnecessary," says *Calvin*, "for if often happens that the rightful owners are thrust out from their own possession, because there is none to defend them. But God hath given Himself to us as our inheritance in such wise that by His aid we are ever maintained in the enjoyment thereof." David knew that his earthly power and glory might be torn away from him, but in God he had a kingdom which could not be moved. Thus in the 8th verse, "I shall never be moved." "The gates of hell shall never prevail; Christ, our Samson, hath flung them off their hinges."—*Trapp*.

It is :

III. Joyful (ver. 6). "I have a goodly heritage." "Yea, my inheritance is acceptable unto me. What had come to him as his inheritance, he embraced with the full approval of his judgment and his affections."—*Kay*. It was just what he wanted. Men of the world toil for wealth, splendour, power, notoriety, and having attained the object of their ambition, grieve over it, as the disappointed child grieves over the fingered butterfly. But in the knowledge, love, and service of God we realise a treasure and joy congenial and satisfying to our deepest nature.

It is :

IV. Permanent (ver. 9-11). Here the Psalmist exults in a glorious hope, full of immortality. "David's hope rests on this conclusion: it is impossible for the man who, in appropriating faith and actual experience, calls God his own, to fall into the hands of death."—*Delitzsch*. His life is hid with Christ in God, and so far from death spoiling him in any sense, it will but give him fuller possession of his glorious inheritance. How perishable all merely human good! There is a wild Indian story which tells of a girl falling in love with a handsome young warrior, who was

however, really, but an image of snow. Immediately after their marriage they took a journey, and as the sun appeared in the horizon the bridegroom melted away. Man, falling in love with earthly things, is wasting his affections upon an image of snow: "The fashion of this world passeth away." But rich and happy in the blessing of God, we are rich and happy for evermore.

"A house we call our own
Which cannot be o'erthrown :
In the general ruin sure,
Storms and earthquakes it defies ;
Built immovably secure,
Built eternal in the skies."

BEULAH.

(Verses 9-11.)

The Psalmist is here on the mountain top. He gains a bright view of the glorious future, and is filled with rapture. He is assured of life, resurrection, immortality.

Observe :

I. The grandeur of his hope.

1. In the 10th verse, he exults to believe that he shall be altogether saved from the power of death and the grave. He believes that neither his nobler part, his glory, nor yet his body, shall suffer loss. God's holy ones, God's favourites, shall not be forsaken; their bodies not abandoned to the tomb, their souls not abandoned to the invisible world. But, 2. The Psalmist not only exults in being delivered from the power of death, he anticipates unknown glories (ver. 11). Passing out of the shadow of death, he will pass into the glorious light of God's unveiled face. There is a path of life winding through the valley and shadow of death, leading through the churchyard, and leading right into the golden goal. "The glory to be revealed" is here indicated. (1.) Its *fulness*. "Fullness of joy." "Satiety, or rather satisfaction, in its strongest sense."—*Alexander*. (2.) Its *variety*. "Pleasures" "The plural, joys, denotes not only richness, but variety."—*Alexander*. Our manifold nature will find all it needs when it thus drinks at the rivers of His pleasure. (3.) Its *perpetuity*. "For evermore."

II. The ground of his hope. A certain writer has defined commentators as, "The worthy folks that too often write on books as men with diamonds write on glass, obscuring light with scratches." But on this passage before us we have the benefit of two inspired commentators, St. Peter and St. Paul, who quote this psalm in the 2d, 3d, and 13th chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. They show that the Psalmist had the Messiah in his illuminated eye when he uttered these soaring words. These words were true of David only in a very limited sense; they found their full realisation only in Him who was David's Lord. We may regard David as exulting in these lofty prospects *on the ground of his faith in the Messiah*. Because Christ should thus triumph, he knew his triumph assured in Christ. "The hope of his own immortality was based upon, and bound up in, the life of Him who was at once his Son and his Lord. What was true of David in the lower sense, was true in the fullest and highest sense of Christ; was only true of David, because it was true of Christ; and is only true of any of us in and through Him, according to His own words, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.'"—*Peronne*.

"The *path of life*," is the work of Christ. "Thou wilt show me the path of life." The *Guide* is the presence of

Christ. The true Beulah is Calvary; from the shadow of the Cross we gain a clear and confident vision of the glory

of the skies. "Yea, though I walk through the valley and the shadow of death," &c.

PSALM XVII.

INTRODUCTION.

"David pours forth to God in this psalm an earnest prayer for deliverance from his inveterate enemies, who were bent on taking away his life. We find in it his opinion of the character of his oppressors, who were obviously persons of consideration and influence, and who were disposed to exercise all the power which their station enabled them to command, to gratify their hatred and malice against him. He affirms his own innocence, and expresses his full conviction that the time would come when the relative conditions of himself and his opponents would be changed. Many persons think, and with some reason, that the psalm was written on the occasion when Saul and his men pursued David in the wilderness of Engedi."—*Phillips*.

SAFE STEPS ON DANGEROUS PATHS.

(Verses 4, 5.)

We are reminded here:

I. Of our need of the Divine succour.

"Hold up my goings in Thy paths" (ver. 5). This is the language of one who felt that he could not hold himself up. Some in the pride of their heart imagine that they can, in their own wit and strength, face life and its difficulties. Let us look at the path of life, the path which leads to heaven, and we shall see our need of a Divine Helper. In our way through this world to a better we must often encounter:

1. *Steep paths.* How pure, perfect, high are the statutes of God! We are born in the depths of sin and shame. All that is truly great and truly good lies far above us, as those white mountains of Switzerland lie above the traveller, their tops touching heaven. Now, who can ascend the holy hill? Can we, in our own strength, get so much above ourselves, so much beyond ourselves? Surely not. Without superhuman help we should soon grow faint and weary in scaling these sublime heights, and glide down, or fall down, into sense and sin.

2. *Rough paths.* Life has its paths of suffering, the paths that have to be traversed with bleeding feet. Here human nature often faints and falls. Men strike against sick-beds, bereavements, losses, persecutions, and lose all energy, peace, hope. Our heart is often "discouraged because of the way," and

unless we have Divine strength, comfort, guidance, we must perish.

3. *Dark paths.* We are often in most perplexing circumstances, and it is very easy for us to get wrong. "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." Our path is often untried, strange, and dangerous. We speak of taking a leap in the dark. We are constantly doing this, compelled to do it; life is a series of leaps in the dark. If a Heavenly Hand does not aid us, we must stumble and fall.

4. *Slippery paths.* Days of youth, when the blood is hot, and life free and full; days of temptation, when a strange illusive light brightens into beauty things of death and darkness; days of comfort, when there is nothing to stir the soul, but everything to lull it; days of prosperity, when riches and honours increase: these are the times when we stand on slippery paths, on enchanted ground; and unless God help us, we are soon, as an old writer says, "on all fours." Alpine climbers say that the icy peaks which sometimes they attempt to climb are like "the neck of a bottle," and it is hard work to keep from sliding into the abyss. Life has paths similarly slippery, and unless a Divine guide uphold us, our steps will slide.

"In Ps. xvi. 11 we read, 'Thou wilt show me the *path of life*;' here the psalm speaks of the *paths* of the *destroyer*. The path of life is one; but

there are *many paths* of the destroyer."—*Wordsworth*. And Satan is perpetually seeking to drive or to draw us from the King's highway into his destructive paths. "The path of life is like the vale of Siddim, slimy and slippery, full of lime-pits and pit-falls, springs and stumbling-blocks."—*Trapp*. "*Hold up my goings*"—as a careful driver holds up his horse when going down hill. We have all sorts of paces, both fast and slow, and the road is never long of one sort, but with God to hold up our goings, nothing in the pace or in the road can cast down."—*Spurgeon*. "Lord, hold me up, that I may hold out."—*Watson*.

We are reminded :

II. Of the sufficiency of the Divine succour. The Psalmist has no doubt of his safety if only God will save him. Thus, in another place : "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Ps. cxix. 117). There is no royal road to heaven, but there is a royal *Helper*, and none can perish who cling to Him. "God is able to make you stand" (Rom. xiv. 4). There is a Catholic story which relates that once a holy painter was painting on the lofty ceiling of a church the image of one of the apostles. Absorbed in his work the artist stepped back to contemplate it, and stepped beyond the edge of the scaffolding ; in a moment the figure that he was painting started into life, caught the falling artist, and set him down safely by the altar. If we live in the Church, and seek to glorify God, whenever we take a dangerous step, or stand in perilous slight, a Hand stronger than that of Peter's, stronger than Gabriel's, shall preserve us, and keep us in safety.

"On every side He stands,
And for His Israel cares;
And safe in His Almighty hands,
Their souls for ever bears."

Learn :

1. That we are safe *only whilst we*

rest in God. All other securities for good living are valid only whilst God gives them efficacy. Promises, vows, pledges, all are unreliable, except as God gives them fixity and force. God's help is the key-stone of all prudential measures. We must all try to take the dying minister's advice : "Stand up for Christ, stand up in Christ."

2. That it is the privilege of the believer to be *held up*. Not only to be *picked up* when we have fallen, but to be *held up*, so that we may not fall. The old poet sings—

"That which makes us have no need
Of physic, that's physic indeed."

Preventing grace is the best physic.

3. That we are preserved from falling by *holding to God's Word*" (ver. 4). "Whatever men in general may do or say, I have but one guide and rule of action, viz., Thy Word."—*Perowne*. And *Kay* renders (ver. 5). "Because my treadings held firm to Thy paths, my steps have been unmoved." "*By holding fast my goings in Thy paths*, or rather, *tracks*, *ruts of wheels*, *my footsteps have not been moved*. I owe my safety to the care which I take to tread in Thy footsteps." *Wordsworth*. If we hold firmly by God's Word, that Word will preserve us. It shows us which are the *false* paths. "By the words of thy lips I have marked the paths of the transgressor."—*Wordsworth*. It strengthens us to walk in *true* paths. Its examples, its promises, the grace which is ever given in the reading of it, energise us to walk in the path of life which it indicates.

4. That the text gives no sanction to *carelessness and sloth*. If God hold us up we have something to do, we have to hold to Him. To hold God's hand day by day is the supremest effort of the soul, it means unceasing thought, prayer, endeavour. God only saves those who daily cling to Him in sighs, and prayers, and tears.

SPECIAL NEED, SPECIAL HELP.

(Verses 7-14.)

I. Special Need. "Show Thy marvellous lovingkindness" (ver. 7).

"Make Thy grace wonderful."—*Moll*.
"Exhibit Thy special mercies, Thor

who savest them that flee for refuge.”—*Kay*. “It has particular reference to extraordinary favours, implying an unusual necessity.”—*Alexander*. The Psalmist was in a position of *peculiar* distress and peril. Mark his trying position as here depicted by himself.

1. The *number* of his enemies (ver. 9). They compassed him about. He felt that he was hemmed in by them on every side. 2. The *character* of his enemies. They were deadly enemies (ver. 9). As the 10th verse particularises, they were proud, arrogant, unfeeling. “Their heart is not a pulsating human heart, but a lump of fat.”—*Moll*. Insensible, obdurate, cruel. 3. The *strategy* of his enemies (vers. 11, 12). “They had fixed their eyes intently on the Psalmist, with a purpose to prostrate him to the ground, or completely overwhelm him.”—*Moll*. A greedy lion lurking in secret places, expresses at once, their ferocious disposition and crafty action. It was then with the Psalmist a time of *special* need. All God’s people know such times. They are often in deep waters, but sometimes deep calleth unto deep; their sky is often clouded, but sometimes it is eclipsed; they often pass through the fire, but sometimes the furnace is heated seven times hotter than it is wont to be heated. Their trouble is sore, their trial fiery. Their tribulation seems to go beyond that of Christians in general; it certainly goes beyond any which they have experienced in the past. They have need of *extraordinary* help, *marvellous* lovingkindnesses, *special* mercies.

II. *Special Help*. “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings” (ver. 8). How truly sublime these conceptions! In the seasons of deepest distress we have

the brightest visions of God’s love and power to save. In times of deepest trial we are: 1. The *dearest* to God. “Keep me as the apple of the eye.” This is a symbol of that which is dearest to us. How precious is the eye, how carefully guarded by us! So we are never dearer to God than when we want Him most. The most suffering child in a family is the best beloved; and so it is in God’s family (Zech. ii. 8). 2. The *nearest* to God. “Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings.” How near, how safe! “The wings of a hen cover her brood so that they cannot be seen by birds of prey; she covers them against rain and storms; she warms them and strengthens them when they are cold and weak; so likewise does the Divine grace with His children.”—*Moll*. Thus in times of persecution and temptation; of suffering and trouble; of weakness and fear, God draws us all the closer to Himself, and under those wings, whose golden feathers are wisdom and power and love, we hide in safety. 3. The *happiest* in God. The eaglet hiding under the wing of the parent bird is a figure of comfort as well as safety. It is only as we realise deeper experience of pain, and loss, and peril, that we realise the deeper joys of the Divine life. “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (2 Cor. i. 5). The brighter rainbow decks the darker cloud; in mid-winter’s gloom the stars burn brightest. God’s wing is as soft as it is strong, and the sorrow that drives us to the closer communion ensures us a deeper peace, a keener bliss.

“When my sorrows most increase,
Let Thy strongest joys be given:
Jesus, come with my distress,
And agony is heaven!”

SANCTIFIED TRIAL.

(Verses 7-15.)

In these verses we have an illustration of the purifying and ennobling influences of sanctified trouble. We see that unsanctified prosperity degrades those who enjoy it, whilst sanctified adversity lifts up those who suffer it.

I. *Sanctified sorrow drives us nearer God*. In the 7th and 8th verses this is very apparent. “The hard usage of his enemies drove David into God’s blessed bosom; as children misused abroad run home to their parents.”—*Trapp*.

Wronged by the world, buffeted by the messengers of Satan, overtaken by the storms of adversity, in closer fellowship with God we find balm to our soul. One day an aide-de-camp of the late Emperor Nicholas of Russia threw himself at the monarch's feet, and begged from his sovereign permission to fight a duel. The Emperor, who was a staunch opponent of duelling, immediately and emphatically refused. "But, sire, I am dishonoured; I must fight," cried the disconsolate aide. The Czar frowned, and asked him what he meant. "I have been struck in the face," was the ready reply. "Well," said the Emperor, "for all that, thou shalt not fight; but come—come with me." And, taking him by the arm, the Emperor led him into the presence of his court which was assembled in an adjoining saloon. Then, in view of the flower of his realm, the Emperor kissed the cheek of the aide-de-camp which had received the blow. "Go now," he exclaimed, "and be at peace; thy affront has been effaced." Thus, when we are wronged by men or devils, we fly to our God, and the kiss of the King of the universe more than atones for the injury and dishonour that may have been done us. The King's love and favour fill the wounded soul with strength and gladness.

II. Sanctified sorrow conducts to a higher spiritual life. We see this specially in the 14th verse. The Psalmist has been led to feel how much superior is the Divine life to a worldly life. He is led to a new and deeper appreciation of a godly nature, and of all the treasures it inherits. In the midst of persecution and sorrow he realises a more intense spirituality. A naturalist, speaking of the swarms of insects which torment cattle in tropical lands, shows that the sufferings of the cattle issue in their safety. "Observe," says this writer, "that the furious eagerness of the winged insects, which seem to be the agents of death, is frequently a cause of

life. By an incessant persecution of the sick flocks, enfeebled by hot damp airs, they ensure their safety. Otherwise they would remain stupidly resigned, and hour after hour grow less capable of motion, gloomier and more morbid in the bonds of fever, until they could rise no more. The inexorable spur knows, however, the secret of putting them on their legs; though, with trembling limbs, they take to flight, the insect never quits them; presses them, urges them, and conducts them, bleeding, to the wholesome regions of the dry lands and the living waters, where their furious guide abandons them, and returns to the pestilent vapours, to its realm of death." Thus David's enemies, like a swarm of winged insects, drove him to loftier heights of life. If he had been left to a level life of care and prosperity he might have fallen a victim to its relaxing influences, but persecutions and tribulations drove him to the higher walks of thought, and feeling, and life. Is it not often thus with God's people? They are stung by many losses and sorrows; but these afflictions secure their salvation. With trembling limbs, and bleeding hearts, they take their flight from the miasmatic plains of the carnal life, to the tablelands of which God Himself is sun and moon.

III. Sanctified sorrow awakens longings for the heavenly and eternal life (ver. 15). Here we see the Psalmist loosened from earth by his troubles, and looking forward to the heavenly and immortal for the satisfaction of all his longings. Such is the beauty of Damascus that we are told Mahomet feared, if he entered it, his heart would be captivated by its loveliness, and he would be unfitted for the celestial, so he turned away from the gates of the Syrian paradise. Amid scenes of affluence and pleasure we may easily forget our great inheritance; but in disappointment and affliction our heart goes out after that Divine and heavenly inheritance which fadeth not away.

MEN OF THE WORLD.

"Men of the World" (Verse 14).

We will first consider :

I. The characters thus described.

"Men of the world" observe :

1. Their *portion*. "Which have their portion in this life." "The word here used for 'world' denotes the transitory nature of the world as a thing of *time*. Men of the world are those who have made it their home, and who, together with the world and the lust thereof, are passing away. Being thus worldly-minded, they have their *portion* in life, i.e. in the brief years of their existence upon earth."—*Perowne*. "Life is by some understood to mean a life of ease or pleasure; but this is far less natural than the obvious sense of *this life*, this present state as distinguished from futurity."—*Alexander*. (1.) They live to the *visible*. The "world." Their pain and pleasure, hope and fear, loss or gain, all have to do with the senses and the worldly life. (2.) They live to the *present*. Their disposition is gross—their highest good and happiness is in the purely natural life. "Worldliness consists in these three things:—Attachment to the Outward; attachment to the Transitory; attachment to the Unreal: in opposition to love for the Inward, the Eternal, the True."—*Robertson*. A man may not be an atheist, and yet be a man of the world; a man may not be vicious, and yet be a man of the world; nay, a man may be moral, amiable, kind, and yet be a man of the world. They love not God: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." They love the near and the low, not the distant and the high—they are deaf to the injunction, "Set not your affections upon things of the earth." They look at the things which are temporal. How many there are with many good qualities, but who at their best are never more than men of the world!

2. Their *prosperity*. (1.) They have enough for *themselves*. "Whose belly thou fillest with Thy hid treasure."

'To the eye of sense God seems some-

times to have reserved His choicest gifts for the ungodly."—*Alexander*. "They have more than heart could wish, their eyes stand out with fatness" (Job. xxi. 7-15). (2.) They have enough for their *children*. "They are full of children," &c. Margin, *their children are full*. "The obvious signification is, that they have enough for themselves and for their children."—*Barnes*. They found large and flourishing houses. The prosperity of the wicked need not excite any particular surprise. (1.) They set their whole heart on such prosperity. (2.) They bend their whole strength to compass their aim. (3.) They have no moral scruples to stand in the way of their progress. They live to the world, and get it. Its wreaths theirs, its gold, its purple, its dainties.

Observe :

II. The disadvantages of their lot.

The Psalmist in this place is not envying "the men of this world;" but, on the contrary, pities them.

1. *The hand of God is against them*. "From the wicked by Thy sword: from men by Thy hand" (ver. 13, 14). Many take worldly prosperity as a sign of God's favour, but it is no such sign. God's hand is against men of the world. His sword is lifted against them, and must smite ere long if they repent not.

2. *They have a profound discontent*. A carnal content they have, but does not the Psalmist intimate in the 15th verse, that "true" satisfaction comes only through righteousness? Yes, the men of the world are full of precious things—pleasures, honours, gold, and silver—but their spirit is desolate and unsatisfied. "Their portion is a lean and hungry one at the best—one that may fill the hand, but cannot fill the soul."—*Binnie*.

3. *They soon part with their inheritance for ever*. "This world." "This life." Whatever this world gives us it soon takes back again, just as the hungry ocean-waves suck back again the glittering shells with which they first

strewed the shore. And then? "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is

of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 16, 17).

SATISFACTION.

(Verse 15.)

Satisfaction! What a magical word! Oh! What is it? Where is it to be found? Who shall teach us to realise it? In this verse we have suggested to us,

I. The nature of true satisfaction.

1. It is *spiritual*. The Psalmist shows here that it is not external and physical, but internal and spiritual. The sensual men in the 14th verse, are not satisfied men are not men seeking satisfaction in a right direction. Not in mere *sensuality* shall we ever find content. You cannot satisfy the body with thoughts, neither can you satisfy the soul with meats. Not in *social rank and glory* shall we prove satisfaction. The ancient star-worshippers affixed mirrors to their breasts to bring near to them the orbs they worshipped, but the orbs themselves were far away in the heavens, nevertheless; and titles, purple, coronets, golden fortunes, crowns of fame, are but mirrors also in which you have the reflections of high and glorious things—reflections, and nothing more. Not in mere *intellectuality* shall we find content,—art, science, philosophy. St. Augustine complains to God of his friends offering him the books of the philosophers;—"And these were the dishes in which they brought to me, being hungry, the sun and the moon instead of Thee." True satisfaction is not in the sphere of the senses, but of the spirit.

2. It is *complete*. The satisfaction of the sensual in the 14th verse, is one-sided, only regarding one section of the complex nature. The Psalmist's satisfaction was all pervasive—the gratification of his whole being—appetite, sensibility, imagination, spirit. "*Their's*, partial, defective, such as would but gratify their bestial part; *his*, adequate, complete, a *happiness of proportion*, such

as should satisfy the man." — *John Howe*.

3. It is *full*, "satisfied, fed to the full." — *French*. The whole nature blessed, and *fully* blessed. "They hunger no more, neither do they thirst any more."

4. It is *everlasting*. The Psalmist looks forward here to the great future, and anticipates endless blessedness. The perpetuity of the inheritance of the worldly man referred to in verse 14, is quite a mock immortality—he dies, and his estate is soon dissipated; but the joy of a spiritualised and perfected nature flows for evermore.

II. The source of true satisfaction.

1. *The vision of God*. "As for me—in righteousness let me behold Thy face." — *Perowne*. The knowledge of God—the perception of His goodness, wisdom, beauty. The secret of all our discontents is our misapprehension of the Divine nature, law, government, purpose. If we could see the Throne, and Him that sits thereupon, with unclouded face—for really the cloud is on our face, not on God's—our soul would be filled with ecstasy. To know that God is all beauty, and His law all love, and His government all wise, and His kingdom and eternity all joy—to *know* this, is overflowing and everlasting gladness. To have a clear, full vision of Jesus, Who is the brightness of the Father's glory, is the secret of satisfaction. Observe, it is through righteousness that we gain this vision. "*In righteousness let me behold Thy face*." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." 2. *The likeness of God*. "When I awake with Thy likeness." "When Thy likeness is awakened." — *Horsley*. As we become pure we get the clearer vision of God, and as we get the clearer vision of God, the Divine image is inwrought once more in our

deepest nature. "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," &c. (2 Cor. iii. 18).

"Unlike my God I cannot rest,
For sin is perfect misery :
But stamp Thine image on my breast,
Conform my hallowed soul to Thee.

"Partaker of Thine utmost grace,
My soul would then be satisfied ;
As Moses, when he saw Thy face,
And sank into Thine arms and died."

(1.) This satisfaction may be *largely attained* in this life. It is a grave error to place this satisfaction wholly in the future. In this life we may, through

the grace of Jesus, attain power over sin, fix our heart singly upon God, and attain thus to the vision of God, the likeness of God, and all the joy of which God is the fountain. Let us seek a pure heart. (2.) This satisfaction is *fully attained* in the life to come. "They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." Here we begin to awake in the likeness of God, and as His image shines more clear in our soul, our satisfaction becomes more profound ; in heaven, that likeness shall be complete—we shall see Him as He is, and our joy shall be full.

PSALM XVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

"This magnificent triumphal hymn was composed by David in celebration of his deliverance from his enemies. But the sublimity of the figures used in it, and the consent of ancient commentators, even Jewish as well as Christian, but, above all, the citations, made from it in the New Testament, evince that the kingdom of Messiah is here pointed at under that of David. It may thus be divided into five parts.

Part I. Consisting of the first three verses, is the proem of the song.

Part II. Celebrates miraculous deliverances from a state of affliction and distress.

Part III. Thanksgiving ; five verses, from the twentieth to the twenty-fourth.

Part IV. Celebrates success in war ; eighteen verses, from the twenty-fifth to the forty-second.

Part V. The establishment of Messiah's kingdom ; eight verses, from the forty-third to the fiftieth."—*Bishop Mant.*

TRUE LOVE.

(Verse 1.)

This verse gives a picture of the human heart in its sublimest mood. It is an eloquent expression of the loftiest affection. The love of the Psalmist was "true," because,

I. **The object of it was right.** "I will love *Thee*." Not, *nature*. Some expend the whole fund of their admiration and delight on the works of God. They admire creation, idealise it, idolise it. They give a fanciful life to sun and moon and stars, to the firmament, to the earth, and then worship them. This love inspires our naturalistic, pantheistic poetry—a poetry sadly popular. Not, *humanity*. We see many lavish their affection on their friends, and a certain philosophy tells us that the noblest object of love is the human race. We see J. S. Mill in England,

and Comte in France, denying the love of God, and then adoring in the most extravagant fashion a couple of women. We may easily fall into the same mistake—loving the creature more than the Creator. There is, indeed, no sin in loving, in fervently loving, such of our fellows as may appear in our eyes to be beautiful or noble ; but that our love should be confined to these is the fault of faults. Not, *self*. How common is self-idolatry ! To be wholly occupied with our own interests—ever burning incense to our own greatness ! How many are their own divinities, living to glorify, to serve, to worship themselves ! Not, *the world*. The Apostle says that the love of the world is enmity with God. What is this love of the world which is opposed to the love of the

Father? The setting of our affections on the *gifts* of God—wealth, rank, honours, learning. There are many such. They are lovers of pleasure, fortune, fame, more than lovers of God. They forget, or almost forget, the Giver in the gift. *God is true object of love.* 1. He should be the *first* object. The Psalmist begins with extolling God. The first verse of every chapter in our life should be: “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.” 2. He is the *worthy* object. To love creation, or its gifts, is to love what is dead. Love is only worthily placed on a *living* person. To love the creatures, is to love what is imperfect: when we love any person, we love not so much the actual person, but rather an ideal person. Their merits, their charms, exist to a large extent in our imagination. But God is the all-perfect One; all perfections exist actually and absolutely in Him. 3. He is the *chief* object. “Thee” only Thee; all other creatures or things in Thee. “Nothing must we love above God, or so much as God, much less against God.”—*Trapp.*

II. The measure of it was right.

1. It was a *boundless* love. The just measure of love to God is a measureless love. “I will love Thee.” “The word signifies to love with the greatest intensity.”—*Phillips.* “Affectionately do I love Thee.”—*Moll.* “Fervently do I love Thee, O Jehovah, my strength.”—*Perowne.* The Psalmist loved God from the depths of his heart; loved Him with a burning, boundless affection. As one has said: “Every river does the most good whilst it keeps within its banks, except the Nile, and that does the most good when it overflows its banks; so each human passion is best kept within bounds, except love to God, and that is best when it overflows, when

it is shed abroad.” 2. It was an *everlasting* love. It overflowed both space and time. “The future form, *I will love*, represents it as a permanent affection, and expresses a fixed purpose. “I not only love Thee now, but am resolved to do so for ever.”—*Alexander.* “Nothing shall separate me from the love of God,” &c.

“What though my flesh and heart decay,
Thee shall I love in endless day!”

III. The inspiration of it was right.

“O Lord, my strength.” The Psalmist’s heart was touched by the love of God. “The simple form of the verb is here used to denote the reciprocal affection of the inferior party.”—*Alexander.* He had felt God’s love to himself, and in return He loved God. “We love Him because He first loved us.” A true love to God is something more than a mere intellectual admiration, something more than a moral appreciation; it is the offspring of a consciously, indebted, and deeply-moved heart. The idea of the mystics, that we must love God simply for His own sake, is not scriptural. We love much because much has been forgiven us; because great gifts have been imparted to us; because great deliverances have been wrought out for us.

Remember—the love of God is the secret of strength and victory. The love of God gives us the victory over all *inward* foes. Great is the purifying power of this sublime affection. “Faith which worketh by love, and purifies the heart.” “The love of God gives us the victory over all *outward* foes” (Rom. viii. 35–39). “So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might” (Judges v. 31).

DIVINE SALVATION.

(Verses 2, 3.)

We observe:

I. The Psalmist’s confession (ver. 2).

He acknowledges, 1. That *God* was his deliverer. “*Jehovah* is my stronghold,” &c. “My God is my strength,” &c. The

Psalmist does not impute his deliverance from Saul and his other enemies, to his own prowess, or to secondary causes; *God* was his help. There was a power of supernatural faith in David

lifting him above the temptation to idealise and deify aspects of nature. The rocks and fortresses and strongholds of the country, where many of David's exploits were performed, might have led a less devout mind to forget God, and ascribe its triumphs to its own prowess, combined with geographical advantages. Not so with David. His faith penetrated secondary causes, and visible helps and agencies only became the symbols of the invisible. "*Jehovah is my stronghold,*" &c. Let us give the glory of our deliverances to God—not to self, or nature, or chance. Let us give *all* the glory to God. Not a word here about geographical help, or human help, or self-help. If we thus honour God, God shall honour our faith, and save us in all natural and spiritual perils. 2. God was his *perfect* deliverer. Seven is the number of perfection; and here we have according to the reading of *Perowne* seven metaphors crowded together setting forth the perfection of God as the Saviour of His people. "*Jehovah (is) my stronghold and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God is my rock wherein I find refuge, my shield and horn of my salvation, my high tower.*" God is a *perfect* Saviour. "*Rock;*" "*shield;*" "*horn;*" indicate various forms of defence and shelter, of immunity and deliverance. (1.) God *preserves* His people in the day of evil. He is a garrison to them in the time of trial and temptation. Talk of the seven wonders of the world! what are they but imperfect images of the magnificent bulwarks which God raises about His people!

"On every side He stands,
And for His Israel cares;
And safe in His Almighty hands
Their souls for ever bears."

(2.) God *delivers* His people from the power of evil. He is more than a defender, He is a deliverer. He causes our foes to raise the siege, and leave us unharassed and unharmed. (3.) God causes His people to *triumph* over the enemies by whom they have been menaced. "The horn of my salvation." As the "shield" stands for a weapon of *defence*, so the "horn" stands for a weapon of

offence. "The horn is a symbol of strength in attack."—*Perowne*. God not only shelters and delivers His people, but He enables them to carry the war into the enemies' camp, and to reap glorious spoils in the battle. God not only saves His people, but "Satan is bruised under their feet; He not only delivers His Church from the wrath of men and devils, but strengthens it to overthrow the kingdom of darkness. 3. God was his *personal* deliverer. "*My*" rock, "*my*" fortress, "*my*" deliverer. The tried saint feels that he has a personal and peculiar interest in God. God's manifestations of help and power are so rich and multiform in their character that they carry a separate secret for every separate heart. Just as there were rocks and strongholds about Bethlehem and Engedi that David's eye had marked for many a year, and that his own foot only knew how to climb; so there are forms of Divine help and blessing, as many and as varied as God's relations to individual souls, and the secret paths to the attainment of which lie within our individual faith. Let us not be afraid of tribulation, for it unites us all the more intensely with God. Peril deepens experience and individualises the relations in which we stand to God. But for the years of danger in which his youth had been spent, the Psalmist would never have been able to realise all that power of intense, believing, personal appropriation, signified by the use of the possessive pronoun, "*My* strength:" "*My* fortress:" "*My* God."

We observe:

II. The Psalmist's resolution (ver. 3). "I will call upon the Lord," &c. Having shown that the Lord is worthy to be praised and trusted, how natural it is that this resolution should follow? And yet, how often is it the case that we acknowledge the glorious perfections of our God in our lips, and yet do not follow up the acknowledgment with a hearty practical confidence! Call upon the Lord for help, and you praise Him in so doing; call upon the Lord, so shall you be saved from your enemies. Some say that children, weak in every

other respect, have such strong voices that they may be able to cry aloud, and thus secure help in times of danger; the children of God, weak and helpless

amid foes and perils, have a cry to pierce the heavens and bring down help. Cry! cry aloud! and God shall save.

DE PROFUNDIS.

(Verses 4-19.)

Consider:

I. The Psalmist's peril (ver. 4, 5). "The sorrows of death" (ver. 4). "According to the reading of 2 Sam. xxii. 5, 'the breakers of death,' The metaphor is taken from those dangerous waves which our mariners call white-breakers."—*Horsley*. "The floods of ungodliness made me afraid."—*Perowne*. "The reference is here to wicked men, whose number and violence are indicated by the figure of torrents and overflowing streams."—*Alexander*. "The sorrows of hell," &c. (ver. 5). The bands of the grave, the snares of death. "By bands we are probably to understand the cordage of a net, such as fowlers spread for birds."—*Alexander*. "Death is represented as a hunter with a cord and net."—*Delitzsch*. Whichever way the Psalmist turns there is dreadful danger. Thus are we found in our *sinful estate*. We are in the power of evil. Sin as a torrent carries us away; the devil has entangled us in the meshes of his net; there seems no way of escape from the second death. When our eyes are opened to our true situation we are overwhelmed with horror. Thus do we sometimes find ourselves in days of *trouble and persecution*. We are compassed about with sorrow and darkness. There seems to be no way of escape.

II. The Psalmist's prayer (ver. 6). 1. Its *fergency*. "Called." "Cried." 2. Its *singleness*. "I called upon *Jehovah*; i.e., when I am in trouble I call on *Jehovah* only, and make my supplication to no other deliverer."—*Phillips*. 3. Its *efficacy*. "He heard my voice out of His temple," &c. "Not the temple, or tabernacle, on Mount Zion, but the temple in heaven, wherein God especially manifests His glory, and where He is worshipped by the heavenly hosts—a place which is both

temple and palace."—*Perowne*. What wonderful tenderness and oversight are suggested by the answer that met the Psalmist's cry! The temple full of music, but the cry of distress carries as far as the angelic symphonies, and reaches an all-sensitive ear; the temple full of radiance and glory and beauty, but away amidst the gloom of the under-world a Divine eye sees the prostrate and struggling form of a servant of God; God hears the cry out of His very temple, and leaves the very temple, as described in the subsequent verses, for the help and deliverance of His servant. The celestial world is a world full of glory, music, and joy; and yet, it is quick to sympathise with a world of want and sorrow. Do not restrain prayer because of heaven's *distance*; not because of its *magnificence*; not because of its *sanctity*, for it is a "temple," a place of mercy and reconciliation.

III. The Psalmist's preservation (ver. 7-19). "It is true we find no express record of any incident in David's life of the kind recorded in 1 Sam. vii. 10, but it must be some real experience, which David here idealises."—*Delitzsch*.

Observe:

1. The *power* of the Divine Helper (ver. 7-9). "The earth shook and trembled," &c. Whilst God was a rock and refuge to David, He was a power that rocked the very mountains, to say nothing of the frail fortresses of the Psalmist's foes. God is a wall of fire to His people, but a consuming fire to His enemies. 2. The *swiftness* of the Divine Helper (ver. 10). "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly," &c. "He is a *present* help in the time of trouble."

"Ere we can offer our complaints,
Behold Him present with His aid."

3. The *mystery* of the methods of the

Divine aid (ver. 11). "He made darkness His veil."—*Moll.* "The word rendered *secret place*—means properly a *hiding*."—*Barnes.* In strange ways God saves His people. Be patient and believing.

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform," &c.

As the 12th verse intimates, it is not all obscurity. "At the brightness that was before Him the thick clouds were scattered." There were out-gleams. So if we keep our eye on the Divine government we shall often get glimpses of the light and love by which it is pervaded. 4. The *efficacy* of the Divine aid (ver. 13–18). God's power utterly

discomfited the foes of His people. In the 7th verse "the *earth* shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved;" in the 13th verse the "*heavens*" shake, and pour down hail-stones and fire. No wonder that the wicked were "scattered" in dire confusion. Let us not forget that this glorious power is pledged to the weakest saint. Our enemies may be too strong for us, but they are not too strong for Him. 5. The *fulness* of the Divine deliverance (ver. 19). God's help never stops at the mere point of deliverance. God's power never comes down to help us out of our perils only; it comes to bring us to better things than we had known heretofore.

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL.

(Verses 7–19.)

The Psalmist does something more here than "idealise" nature, we think that he suggests some important thoughts concerning the relation of nature to the supernatural. Dr. Farrar in his "Chapters on Language" observes: "What Mr. Ruskin has called 'the pathetic fallacy,' is the indomitable desire to see in nature, or at least to attribute to her, a sympathy in our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. Hence, to the imagination of the Psalmist and prophet, 'the hills clap their hands;' 'the valleys sing;' 'the morning stars shout for joy;' 'the fir-trees howl,' &c., &c. In modern poets the same fancy recurs with constant intensity, so that there is hardly a single aspect of nature which has not been made to express or to interpret the thoughts and passions of mankind, and hardly a single modern poem which does not illustrate this imaginative power," p. 214. But there is something far deeper than this in the relation of God's people to nature; they not only see their experience mirrored in nature, but have the assurance that nature sympathises with them, and ministers to them in a far more profound sense. In that portion of the psalm which is now before us, we see:

I. Nature as obedient to supernatural power. We see God moving

heaven and earth. All forces doing His bidding—the wind, the clouds, the lightning, the thunder, the mountains, the sea. The Psalmist in this song may have "idealised" some of his experiences, but his idealisation assumes the obedience of nature to the will of God. The *Scriptures* constantly teach this. The Old Testament is full of it, and the New. *Reason* sanctions it. It is so natural to think of the world being plastic to the will of God, that when men cease to believe in God being able to modify nature they soon cease to believe in Him at all. *Experience* confirms it. There are few good men but who are firmly persuaded that God has interfered with the natural order on their behalf. *Science* can prove nothing to the contrary. Science not only tells us of the invariability of law, but she tells us with equal emphasis of the modifiability of law; and if the human will can modify natural law, who shall set the limits of the Divine interference with the natural order?

We see:

II. Nature as the executant of a supernatural will. We see in this psalm nature as an executant of the Divine *anger*. How all the forces of nature are here arrayed against the wicked! Nature is God's minister to

execute wrath upon them that do evil. It seems sometimes as if nature were against God, and for sin and sinners ; but if we look further down we shall see that nature is on the side of God and righteousness. Let the wicked remember that the visible universe is God's vast arsenal, and when once He is angry He can turn all the bright and beautiful things of nature into the swift ministers of death and ruin. We see nature also as an executant of the Divine *grace*. There is a dark side of nature for the enemies of God—there is a bright side for the friends of God. All this storm and earthquake was in mercy to David. Child of God, know nature to be thy friend ! We are too apt to look upon nature as rigid and inexorable, and in no way sensitive to the generous will of Heaven. In our fear and suffering we look out upon nature and think how reckless she is of our sorrowful moods ; we aggravate our sufferings by deeming nature unsympathetic, as we should aggravate them by encountering the face of a foe. Remember, if your purposes and life are only in perfect accord with

God, God is always with you to aid, and the colossal and apparently immobile forces of nature are fluttering like threads of gossamer in delicate sympathy with all His manifestations of care and help and succour for you.

We see :

III. Nature ministering to supernatural purpose. Not to material, but to moral and spiritual ends. Remember the higher ministry of nature. Nature is really but a mass of means which God uses for the salvation and sanctification of His creatures. Heathen fables tell us of nature being affected by great military and political events, but God's Word shows us nature ministering to great moral and religious ends, and this is well worthy of credence. The inferior universe serves the higher universe. We may well believe that the sun was darkened at man's redemption ; that natural law and phenomena are controlled with a view to man's moral education ; that ordinary laws and processes are disturbed to secure man's immortal salvation.

THE BOW IN THE CLOUD.

(Verses 16-20.)

The Psalmist in the preceding verses has shown us the earth rent by earthquakes and the heavens blackened by thunder-clouds, here we see the rainbow span the horrible tempest—God's pity and aid to His afflicted servant. The rainbow has various colours, and there are several aspects of God's government towards His afflicted people shining out brightly in this paragraph.

Notice :

I. The supremacy of God's government. "He sent *from above*" (ver. 16). All was shaken on the earth, all eclipsed in the sky, but above the firmament God sits in perfect repose. Above all the storms and revolutions of earth God reigns, and reigns with undisturbed sovereignty. It is a mighty comfort to the believer to be able to cry, amid wars and tumults and eclipses : "Hallelujah,

the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Oh ! that the people of God would look in dark days in the right direction ! "*He sent from above.*" We look to society, or to self ; to history, to posterity ; to earth beneath us, to the world around us ; we look anywhere instead of looking up. Await salvation "*from above.*" In our dark days the door of hope is a door which opens into heaven ; let us knock at that door, and wait the help which is never denied. "God being *enthroned* on high, and dwelling in the heavens, does not separate Him from His servants on earth ; it merely exhibits Him in His *exaltation* above all the powers of the world and the abyss ; it no more prevents Him from *hearing* the sighs and supplications of the oppressed, than from *making known* His presence, to

help in gracious condescension to the needs of men."—*Moll.*

II. The discriminativeness of God's action. "He took *me*, He drew *me* out of many waters" (ver. 16). The frightful storm which has just been pictured sweeping the world seems as if it would involve the guilty and the innocent in one common ruin, but we are reminded that it is not so. In the midst of these appalling displays the Psalmist was safe. The Hand that was hurling lightnings and hailstones and coals of fire, was outstretched in the gentle task of helping the imperilled good. When human authority seeks to punish, it is frequently undistinguishing, and strikes the innocent with the guilty. And it often *seems* as if the Divine authority were equally undistinguishing. The great laws which govern nature, society, and human life, seem blind and indiscriminating; but let us be sure that it is not so. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Fear God, and serve Him with all your heart, and you shall know that there is a law which discerns between the evil and the good. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee" (Psalm xci. 5-8).

III. The tenderness of God's methods. "He drew me out of many waters." "There is peculiar beauty in the word translated *draw*, which is the root of the name *Moses*, and occurs, besides the place before us, only in the explanation of that name recorded by

Himself" (Exod. ii. 10).—*Alexander.* In this psalm God is seen surrounded by awful terrors, but yet He deals with His servant in great gentleness. He has thunder, lightning, hailstones, for His foes—music, sunbeams, dewdrops, for His people. "He drew me." Softly, tenderly, does God withdraw His servants from scenes of peril.

IV. The effectiveness of God's aid (ver. 17, 18). The Psalmist was no match for his foes. They were strong, and they took advantage of his weakness. "They fell upon me in the day of my calamity."—*Moll.* And in his various wars David repeatedly sustained partial defeats. But the Lord was his stay. "They prevented me in the day of my calamity; i.e., came on me suddenly, unawares, when I was unprovided and helpless, and must have destroyed me had not God upheld and supported me when I was in danger of perishing. God was to the Psalmist *for a staff* to support him. What the staff is to one that is ready to fall, the means of recovering and preserving him; that was God to David in the time of his extremity."—*Dr. Chandler* quo. by *Spurgeon.* Our enemies may easily be too much for us, but they cannot prevail against God. Believer! rest in God. Extremity of help will come in extremity of need; and when you are the weakest, God shall glorify Himself the most by working out your uttermost salvation.

V. The bountifulness of God's grace (ver. 19). "He brought me forth to a wide place."—*Phillips.* If we are faithful to God, our temptations and sorrows are ever working out for us a more perfect liberty, a higher being, a greater weight of glory.

THE GREAT SALVATION.

(Verse 16.)

There can be little doubt but that David in this place is idealising some of his own experiences; but that eye is very dim which cannot perceive in the Psalmist's language something far beyond a description of his own immediate

temporal danger and rescue. We have not exhausted the meaning of this magnificent hymn until we have seen in it a foreshadowing of the world's redemption in Jesus Christ.

Behold:

I. A great danger. What is that danger? *A world of sinners on the brink of hell.* The Psalmist pictures himself surrounded by death and hell, and altogether helpless in their grasp. It is a picture of the world, considered apart from the truth and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. The race had fallen under the power of sin, and the whole earth was filled with wickedness and wretchedness. Man could not help himself, could not deliver himself from the tyranny of the devil. And each individual sinner feels that his sins have brought him to the brink of the pit. Floods of ungodliness are sweeping him onward to the ocean of wrath. We are perishing sinners.

Behold :

II. A Divine deliverer. "He sent from above." Down in a gulf of dark despair we wretched sinners lay, when God's eye pitied us, and His right arm brought salvation. There was no help *in us*. Man has no resource within himself to cope with the great tide of sin and wrath. No help *around us*. Society cannot save us. No man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. There was no *human* helper, no *angelic* helper, and so God Himself becomes our helper. Guilty man was like a broken ship in a storm, no haven in view, no friendly sail bearing down to his relief, no lighthouse star to cheer, no life-boat on the wave, when God marked his signals of distress, and out of the opened heaven sent him a Saviour, even Christ the Lord. "*He sent from above.*" He sent His *Word*. The oracles of God. He sent His *Son*. May we not say, "*He came from above*"? He sent His *Spirit*. God

has come down to the scene of woe, and invites us to make Him our deliverer. Mark, 1. the *strength* of this Saviour. "*He took me.*" This expresses the strength of His grasp. His right hand doeth valiantly. If our soul is in His hand, who shall tear us out of it? Mark, 2. the *tenderness* of this Saviour. "*He drew me.*" As humane men bend over one who has been rescued from the river, and apply warmth to the chilly limbs, and chafe the livid hands, and pour cordials into the lips, and keep on hour after hour with their tender ministries, until the closed eyes open, and the pallid cheek is tinged with crimson, and the silent lips break into the music of speech; so Christ bends lovingly over sinners plucked from black depths, and by his longsuffering and tenderness arouses and perfects in them a Divine and immortal life.

Behold :

III. A complete redemption. "*He drew me out of many waters.*" He gives us redemption from sin, sorrow, fear, death, hell. Christ is an ark to save the world, and to save us all from many sorrows. Noah's ark floats on the waters, but *its door was shut*. A thousand eager eyes of drowning men might behold it, a thousand cries might be addressed to it, but it gave no response. For a while, men, women, children might cling to it, only, however, to be washed into the awful gulf. But Christ is an ark, the door of which is *wide open*, and every sinking despairing soul may enter in and be saved. And as the ark brought Noah in safety to the new earth; so Christ shall bring His people in safety "*into a large place.*" He shall land them in heaven.

ULTIMATE REASONS.

(Verse 19.)

"He delivered me, because He delighted in me."

We inquire :

I. Why God delivers and honours men? "Because He delighted in me." God's regard to man does not spring, 1. From the fact that He could not do

without us. He could do without us. We are not necessary to Him. "What shall a man profit God?" 2. Neither is this regard explained by any claim we might have on God, arising from the fact that He is our Creator. By a thousand wilful transgressions we

have forfeited any such claim. One of our writers insists: "If a created being has no rights which his Creator is bound to respect, there is an end to all moral relations between them." But who does not feel that through his sin and folly he has lost all "rights," and must cast himself upon the mercy of God? 3. Neither does God esteem any man on the ground of any physical or intellectual quality that he may possess. The creature's skill or force, the piercing wit, the active limb, these are all too mean delights for God. Apart from moral excellences they have no charms in His eyes. 4. Neither can this regard be explained on the ground of any arbitrary election. We are not to imagine that God, for some inscrutable reasons, delights in some and rejects others. On what grounds, then, does God delight in men? (1.) On the ground of *faith*. This was the position of the Psalmist. "In Thee have I trusted." If we honour God with our confidence, He will honour us with His protection. As we trust in God, we make ourselves dear to God; as we trust in Him, we have claims upon Him.

(2.) On the ground of *moral character*. In ver. 20-27 the Psalmist shows why God delighted in him. According to our moral sincerity and circumspection will God delight in us and bless us. "God deals with men according as He sees their hearts to be towards Him. Those who walk before Him in simplicity and uprightness of heart may expect His succour."—*Perowne*. There is nothing arbitrary or partial in God; He will delight in us all, and enrich us with the uttermost salvation, if we trust Him; and prove the sincerity of our faith by our obedience. We observe several

II. Practical lessons suggested by this truth. 1. Let us not perplex ourselves by imagining any favouritism in God. Acceptance with God is on broad grounds, equally open to us all. 2. Let us remember that we cannot recommend ourselves to God on any grounds of nature. We are defaulters, and have lost that moral beauty in which alone God can delight. 3. It is only by believing in God's grace that we can enjoy that grace. 4. It is only by moral sincerity and earnestness that we can retain that grace.

GOOD THINGS FOR GOOD PEOPLE.

(Verses 20-27.)

In these verses the Psalmist shows that the love of God for His people is not a blind and unrighteous predilection, but that the just and righteous God loves righteousness. Observe here two great canons of the Divine rule. First:

I. God deals with us as we deal with Him. (Ver. 20-25.) "The truth, which is here enunciated is, that God's conduct to man is the reflection of the relation in which man has placed himself to God."—*Delitzsch*. David does not mean in these protestations to lay claim to perfection and sinlessness, but he asserts the sincerity of his desire to please God, and the uprightness of his conduct before God. "David here, as in the last psalm, asserts not his freedom from sin, but the consciousness of his own integrity."—*Perowne*. And because he thus sought to recognise God,

and glorify Him—God watched over him, and blessed him. The destiny which God prepares for a man is a reflection of the man's personal character. As shadows and echoes represent their originating substances and sounds; so in the discriminating character of God's judgments there is a complete response to personal character. He who honours God, is honoured by God. 1. Let us remember that we cannot expect God's help except so far as we are pure in purpose and life. 2. Let us observe the loftiness of the standard of conduct which we must observe if we are to claim Divine patronage. "All His judgments were before me" (ver. 22). And they were *constantly* before Him. "And I did not put away His statutes from me" (ver. 22). We must not pick and choose the statutes, but must

observe them all, even those which try us the most; and observe them always, even unto the end. Learn :

II. God deals with us as we deal with one another. (Ver. 26.) "The Psalmist, in this and following verses, intimates that the plan of God's providential conduct to men, is to act towards them as they act towards each other. This is an undoubted principle of His moral government, and ought to constitute a strong motive for the exercise of all Christian virtues in the social relations of life."—*Phillips*. Throughout the Word of God this truth is insisted upon. It is recognised in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." If we are harsh to our brother, God shall exact from us; if we deceive our brother, God shall permit us to be blinded by strong delusions; if we defraud our brother, God shall spoil us; if we will not forgive our brother, neither shall our

heavenly Father forgive us. God stands behind society, and marks our integrity or faithlessness in all the social relations of life, and deals with us accordingly. *Whatsoever* a man sows, and *wheresoever* he sows, *that* shall he reap. Let us, by the grace of God, keep clean hands, and sow golden seeds, and blessed shall the harvest be. Lessons : 1. There can be no salvation except through righteousness. On this ground alone will God bless us on earth; on this ground only admit us to heaven (Rom. ii. 6-9). 2. There can be no righteousness except through grace. David does not formally recognise here this fact, but elsewhere he recognises it fully, and here he assumes it. God's grace *originates* the lofty righteousness here spoken of. It is a Divine righteousness. God's grace *preserves* this righteousness. It keeps us "from our iniquity." God's grace *crowns* this righteousness. Giving to it vast rewards.

BESETTING SINS.

(Verse 23.)

"I kept myself from mine iniquity." David certainly means here some particular sin to which he was most prone.

Observe :

I. We are all the subjects of special weaknesses and temptations. 1. Each *nation* has its besetting sin. Scientific observers tell us that different races of men have different kinds of weeds following in their wake, so that a careful observer can, in travelling, see at once, by merely noticing the prevailing weeds, whether Europeans or Asiatics, Negroes or Indians, have dwelt at certain places. So each nation has its peculiar sin. 2. Each *age* has its besetting sin. In the history of morals we find how various vices have prevailed at various times. Now an age of cruelty; now of intemperance; now of superstition; now of scepticism. Has not our own age its besetting sin? 3. Each *individual* has his besetting sin. John Hunter held that two general

diseases cannot co-exist in the same individual. It is somewhat thus with man morally. Usually a man will be under the influence of some one particular passion or temptation. All sins are in us seminally, potentially, sympathetically, but in some one direction we are specially in danger. This may arise from our *constitution*. "As in the natural man, though there be all the faculties, yet some faculties are in some more lively and vigorous than in others, some are more witty, some are more strong, some quick of sight, some have a ready ear, and others a nimble tongue, &c. So it is in the old man also; there is all the power of sin in an unregenerate man, but in some more dexterous one way than another."—*Strong* quo. by *Spurgeon*. Or it may arise from our *situation*. "There are more temptations to some sins than others, from the different professions or courses of life men take upon themselves. If they follow the court, I need not tell you what temptations and

snare there are to divers sins, and what danger there is of falling into them. If they be listed in the camp, that tempts them to rapine and violence, neglect of God's worship, and profaneness. If they exercise trading and merchandise, they meet with greater enticements to lying and cozening, over-reaching and unjust dealing; and the mystery of some trades, as bad men manage them, is a downright 'mystery of iniquity.' If husbandry, to anxiety about the things of the world, a distrust of God's providence, or murmuring against it. Nay, I could wish in the most sacred profession of all there might be an exception made in this particular; but Paul tells us that even in his days 'some preached Christ even of envy and strife,' some for filthy lucre only, as well as some of good will."—*Dove* quo. by *Spurgeon*.

We proceed :

II. To make several observations touching this particular class of sins.

1. These besetting sins *are to be conquered*. We are sometimes ready to apologise for these sins. We are ready to regard them as hereditary, incurable. The Scriptures do not regard any taint of blood as ineradicable, any passion as invincible, any temptation as insurmountable. The Old Testament says, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." The New Testament says, "*Lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets you.*" To say that religion will not strengthen us to master the easily besetting sin, is to say that it fails where, and when, we need salvation most. 2. In the subduing of our besetting sin lies *the great struggle of life*. Our love to God, our allegiance to Him, is tested, not by ten commandments, but rather by one or two of them. The question of our moral character is fought out on some one question. If we conquer here, we conquer along the whole line; if we fail here, guilty in one point we are guilty in all. The great battle

with the Philistine host is decided by single combat. Smiting this single sin the day is ours, we put to flight the army of the aliens. This sin beneath our feet, and the crown is on our head. 3. We must estimate our character *according to our relation to the besetting sin*. We sometimes flatteringly estimate our character by reckoning up the sins to which we have no inclination. This is a fatal miscalculation. Is it not a maxim in mechanics, that a thing is no stronger than its weakest part? This is as true in morals as in mechanics. When we seek to estimate our character let us ask, how do we stand in regard to our weak points? Are we gaining, or losing ground there? Never mind the strong points. If we perpetually fail in one point let us remember that that is the true index to our character, and that a score of untried virtues will not atone for the one virtue which fails whenever it is put into the fire.

Observe finally :

The discipline by which the easily besetting sin is to be subdued. 1. We must seek *the grace of God*. It is impossible for us to cast aside these sins in our own strength. We must "look unto Jesus." We are to be made perfect by looking at Him, the perfection of beauty, and ever claiming His power and grace. 2. We must *exert ourselves*. "*I kept myself from mine iniquity.*" "God, indeed, in our first conversion works upon us as He did upon the earth, or Adam's body in paradise, before He breathed a soul into it and made it a living creature; such a power as Christ put forth on Lazarus in his grave, for we are 'dead in trespasses and sins;' but yet being living he must walk and act of himself, the Lord will have us to co-operate together with Him, for we are built upon Christ, not as dead, but as 'living stones.'"—*Strong* quo. by *Spurgeon*.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

(Verse 28.)

Here the Psalmist recognises God as,
I. The source of his Light. "For

Thou givest light to my lamp; Jehovah, my God, maketh my darkness to be

bright."—*Perowne*. In 2 Sam. xxii. 29, "Thou, O Jehovah, art my lamp." In days of deep perplexity, in the presence of painful problems, God was his counsellor. Blessed are those who seek light in God! Take your candles to Him, and He shall light them with a shining lustre. Take your understanding to Him, and He shall make it to shed pure illuminations; take your heart to Him, and He shall make it burn with heavenly brightness. Light your candles at the radiant luminary of the Spirit, the Word, the Throne.

II. The source of his joy. "Light is often in Scripture expressive of joy or comfort," for "truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccles. xi. 7; Ps. xcvii. 11; xcii. 4). By a natural opposition, as light is expressive of joy and comfort; so is darkness, of sorrow and misery. The Psalmist, however, speaks in this place of artificial light, a "candle" or "lamp;" which has been supposed to be illustrated by the custom prevailing in Egypt, of never suffering their houses to be without lights, but burning lamps even through the night, so that the poorest people would rather retrench part of their food than neglect it."—*Bishop Mant*. "The lamps lighted in the house is the image at once of *prosperity* and *continuance* of life and happiness."—*Perowne*. Amid the darkness which everywhere presses upon us, God is the lamp of His people, the source of their comfort and gladness." A lamp or candle in the house is a common Hebrew figure for prosperity, and its extinction for distress. See Job xviii. 5, 6; xxi. 17; Prov. xxiv. 20."—*Alexander*. And when God deserts a man, all the light of life is gone.

III. The source of his glory. David himself was called the lamp of Israel

(1 Kings xi. 36, &c.) He was its light and its glory. And God was David's light and glory. "David's life and dominion, as the covenant king, is the lamp which God's favour has lighted for the well-being of Israel, and His power will not allow this lamp (2 Sam. xxi. 17) to be quenched."—*Delitzsch*. Blessed are all those who find in God their life and glory. They want nothing more. He fills them with joy; He crowns them with beauty and glory. 1. God is a *full* Light. All other lights are partial and dim. He is a Sun; He giveth grace and glory, &c. Fulness of light, felicity, honour, in fellowship with Him. He is everything. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory" (Isa. lx. 19). 2. God is a *true* Light. Nothing but the pure white light. "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." The light He imparts never leads astray; the joy He gives has no sorrow added to it; the honour and glory He gives to His children has no abatement or stain, they are altogether kings. 3. God is a *safe* Light. Nothing can extinguish the central orb. And if we put our trust in God, if we draw the supplies of life from Him, nothing can extinguish our joy and hope. We see how David's life and joy and glory were often threatened with total extinction, but the hand of God preserved him, the very darkness of death was lit again into day. 4. God is an *everlasting* light. "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isa. lx. 20).

FULL CONQUEST.

(Verses 29–34.)

In these verses we have the Psalmist exulting as "more than a conqueror."

Observe:

I. The fulness of his victory (ver.

29). 1. He has vanquished a *host* of enemies. A "troop." 2. He has *utterly* vanquished them. "Through a troop." Divided them, broken them

up, scattered them. 3. He has done it easily. "I have run through a troop." I "leaped over a wall." He did not secretly undermine it, or painfully batter it, or just succeed in scaling it, he leaped over it. All enemies, all obstructions, have been triumphantly vanquished.

II. The source of his victory (ver. 29-34). "By thee" (ver. 29). "*In thee, and in my God, i.e., in intimate union with Him and possession of Him, a much stronger sense than that of mere assistance (by thee), which, however, is included.*"—*Alexander*. 1. The Psalmist trusted in God. He identified himself with God (ver. 30). He entertained a lofty sense of God's truth, and faithfulness, and power. 2. The Psalmist trusted in God alone (ver. 31). God is a rock, a ground of confidence that cannot be shaken, and God alone is such a rock. And 3. God gave him the victory. God does all (ver. 32). "Perfect, i.e., absolutely smooth, free from stumblings and errors, leading straight forward to a divine goal."—*Delitzsch*. Strength in both its beginning and continuance is of God. He "girds" with strength at the outset and maketh the whole "way perfect" (ver. 33). God establishes his feet. Enables him to stand where it seemed impossible to find footing; to scale heights which seemed utterly impracticable (ver. 34). God gave him wisdom and prowess to defeat his foes. "It is not the bow of brass which has been David's protection, but Jehovah's shield covered him; Jehovah's right hand held him up; Jehovah's wonderful condescension made him great; Jehovah made room for him to stand,

and subdue those that rose up against him."—*Perowne*.

Lessons:

1. We shall gain the victory of life by allying ourselves with God. All life is a warfare to us, as it was to David; and we shall achieve the victory only in Divine strength. In the natural world we see how feeble men are whilst they use only their own strength, their own eyes, hands, feet. It is when they learn how to avail themselves of God's power that they accomplish marvels. The human hand is feeble, but it uses God's power, and the dynamite rends asunder the rocks, the steam drives the mighty ship or thundering wheels of mills, the electric spark tells our wishes on the other side of the world. We are slow, feeble, local, considered in ourselves; but when science has taught us to avail ourselves of God's power, we dare winds and seas and mountains. So in the moral world. We are feeble indeed in ourselves, we cannot do the things that we would; but when we listen to revelation, and by thought, and faith, and prayer, lay hold of God's strength, we can do all things. 2. If we ally ourselves with God's strength, the victory of life shall be most complete and brilliant. We shall more than prevail. The "high places" of Christian experience shall be reached; the "high places" of the world, the most difficult undertakings of Christian zeal, shall be proudly compassed; the "high places" of Christian hope shall be climbed, and we shall shout the song of victory on those tablelands, of which God Himself is sun and moon.

GOD'S SHIELD.

(Verse 35.)

"Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation."

This "shield" indicates:

I. The availableness of God's help. The fortress can only shelter within its precincts, but the shield is with the warrior wherever he may go. Whatever may be our lot, however singular and exposed, God is with us to uphold and

save. You may have to leave the fortress of a sweet pure home, and go into the midst of gay and worldly society, the "shield" goes with you; you may have to leave the fortress of a moral neighbourhood, to dwell amid the tents of wickedness, the shield goes with you; you are compelled to leave the fortress of a Christian Church and dwell

where you are cut off from Christian privileges and fellowship, the shield goes with you; you are compelled to leave the fortress of a Christian country to dwell in heathenish lands, the shield goes with you. In all places you may realise God's aid. Your shield is ever with you.

This shield indicates :

II. The many-sidedness of God's protecting love. The great round shield preserves the warrior from top to toe. So the loving hand of God shelters our whole personality, and all our interests. Be sure that Satan would seek to wound us in the eye, to darken our understanding; in the heart, to make us faint; in the knee, to injure our devoutness; but God's protecting love shelters us altogether. Our happiness, character, circumstances; in life, in death, in eternity.

The shield indicates :

III. The invincibility of God's strength. It is the shield of "*salvation*." Whoever places himself in the hands of God is safe. If we meet evil in our own strength we shall be overcome, but confide in this Divine armour, and you come out of life's battle without a scratch. Does Satan tempt you to *error*? Confront him as the Saviour did, with God's Word; let "His truth be thy shield and buckler." Are you tempted to *sin*? Be strong in the truth, and love, and righteousness of

God, inwrought by the Holy Spirit into your soul. This shield quenches every fiery dart.

Lessons :

1. Let the believer who has triumphed in life's battles give glory to his Shield. David had escaped the insidious temptation to self-glory, and all his own strength and prowess he humbly ascribed to God. Let us remember that God helps us, not only outwardly by His providence, but inwardly also by a thousand untracked influences, therefore all the praise is His. 2. Let the believer ever hold fast that Shield. Never be without it. Ever living in close communion with God. Never have it to look for. 3. Let those who have been worsted in life's conflicts learn to put their trust in God. Baffled, wounded, humbled, turn from your poor broken self to the immortal love and strength of a Divine Saviour.

"O send me not away ! for I would drink,
E'en I, the weakest, at the fount of life;
Chide not my steps, that venture near the
brink,
Weary and fainting from the deadly strife.

"Went I not forth undaunted and alone,
Strong in the majesty of human might?
Lo ! I return, all wounded and forlorn,
My dream of glory lost in shades of night.

"Was I not guided for the battle-field?
Bore I not helm of pride and glittering
sword !
Behold the fragments of my broken shield,
And lend to me thy heavenly armour,
Lord !"

DIVINE GENTLENESS.

(Verse 35.)

"Thy gentleness hath made me great."

Notice :

I. The greatness of the good. "Hath made me great." David was great politically, intellectually, but this greatness must be understood as moral. The Psalmist humbly, but exultingly, recognises the fact that the grace of God had ennobled his nature, crowned him with spiritual glory and honour. The end of religion is to make men great. And moral greatness is *true* greatness. It alone excites true admira-

tion; makes its possessor happy; it alone abides.

Notice :

II. The gracious discipline through which this greatness is realised. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." We are discrowned kings, and through gentleness God seeks to put the diadem on our head again. Many believe only in force and terror as restorative factors, but if we look around we see on every side the triumphs of gentleness. It is so in *nature*. Power, amazing power is on every hand, yet acting most softly ;

and because it acts so softly filling the landscapes with beauty and fruitfulness. Thus it is in *art*. Gentleness is everything. And thus it is in *society*. In the physician, the parent, the tutor, you see the grand results of gentleness. God, the most powerful Being in the universe, is also the most gentle, and through gentleness seeks to raise his fallen children to true and lasting greatness.

Mark this first :

1. *In God's dealing with us in our sinful state.* The aspect of God to a guilty world is altogether kind and inviting. The aspect of the *Divine Providence*. "He maketh his sun," &c. Of the *Divine Truth*. Great and gracious promises to sinners are on every page of God's Word. Of the *Divine Spirit*. The spirit of God is ever acting in the dark heart of sinners—seeking to inspire, to soften, to save. Infinite love struggles with human perversity, and so we see our way back again to the skies. 2. *God's dealings with us in our penitential state.* Our first approaches to God are usually full of imperfection, and the best penitent needs large indulgence. Our *motives* imperfect; our *methods* faulty; our *faith* feeble. Our tears are not pure; our sackcloth equivocal. God grants us this indulgence. We are often rough with penitents; but at a thousand imperfections God winks, and through this gentleness cheers on the penitent to greater things. "A bruised reed," &c. 3. *God's dealings with us in our accepted state.* We see this (1.) *In what He accepts from us.* Every Christian man has the full and clear conviction that he is never all that he ought to be—his actual life is painfully below his ideal

life. And yet we have the conviction equally full and clear, that although we, and our works, are far from perfection, yet God accepts us and them; and it is this truth which ever encourages us onwards to loftier attainments and experiences. (2.) *In what He does with us.* There is gentleness in all the discipline of life. "He does not permit us to be tried above what we are able to bear." Our afflictions may often seem severe, but they are the expression of the Divine pitifulness. Indeed many commentators translate the text: "Thy afflictions have made me great," "Thy humbling, thy chastening, thy disciplining."—*Phillips*. "Even Thine afflicting hand tendeth to make me great."—*French*. "Thy loving correction."—*Prayer Book*. 4. *God's dealing with us in our backsliding states.* How the Redeemer brought back backsliding Peter to repentance and life! (Isa. liv. 7, 8.) *Sinner*, do not despise this gentleness. You will not be driven to heaven—will you be drawn? *Believer*, economise all the fine influences of life. "I will guide thee with mine eye." "I will be as the dew unto Israel." Improve all the delicate impulses and attractions of the Divine world which lies about you, and ever acts upon you. Let us pray for greater sensitiveness to the love of God; and just as the silver moon, with its soft charm, draws the ocean waters round the globe, until they have glassed the stars of every sky, and sung their anthems on every shore; so shall the good Spirit of God master the wild elements of our nature, and lead us on, and lead us out, until we have seen all God's glory, and shown forth all His praise.

THE MORALITY OF PRAYER.

(Verse 41.)

I. Prayer must be offered in a right cause.

Prayer offered in a wrong cause can never be availing. In the preceding verses we see Providence helping a righteous cause. The Psalmist's rela-

tion to God was not a selfish contract for help, as between the heathen and his idol—the Psalmist sympathised with God's rights and designs. God scatters many prayers in the air, because they are offered in a purely *selfish* cause.

Many prayers also are rejected because offered in a *wicked* cause. "Prayer is so notable a weapon that even the wicked will take to it in their fits of desperation. Bad men have appealed to God against God's own servants, but all in vain; the kingdom of heaven is not divided, and God never succours his foes at the expense of his friends. There are prayers to God which are no better than blasphemy, which bring no comfortable reply, but rather provoke the Lord to greater wrath."—*Spurgeon*.

II. Prayer must be offered in a right spirit.

1. The spirit of *penitence*. Sorrow for past sins—but there was none of that in these heathen. The spirit of repentance is necessary to availing prayer, and if that spirit is wanting, our prayers are abomination. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." (Isa. i. 15, 16.) 2. The spirit of *righteousness*. "The cry extorted in terror, and not coming from an upright heart (ver. 24, &c.), is not heard. See opposite, ver. 6."—*Perowne*. We must live in the love and practice of goodness. "The prayer of a *righteous* man availeth much." "Lifting up *holy* hands." Remember the morality of prayer, and remember it in your daily doings. You are either building up, or

cutting the sinews of your future prayers, by your present conduct. Righteousness is necessary to prayer—not as a channel of merit for our prayers up to God, but as a plane of moral possibility in our lives down which God's answer can come back to us. Let us be severe in the purity of our thought and life, or we shall soon have to utter the lament of the poet:

"God sends me back my prayers, as a father
Returns unop'd the letters of a son
Who hath dishonoured him."

3. The spirit of *confidence*. The spirit of these heathen was that of terror and despair. "As nature prompteth men in an extremity to look up for help; but because it is but the prayer of the flesh for ease, and not of the spirit for grace, and a good use of calamities, and not but in extreme despair of help elsewhere, therefore God hears them not. In Samuel it is, 'They looked, but there was none to save them;' *q. d.* If they could have made any other shift, God should never have heard of them."—*Trapp*. Prayer must be the language of confidence.

III. Prayer must be offered at a right time. They cried first to their own gods, and when there was *none* to answer, then they cried to Israel's God. They prayed too late. Men often do. There is an accepted time in which God will hear prayer, and it is our duty not to let that time pass. (Prov. i. 24–33; John viii. 21; Luke xvi. 24; Rev. vi. 16.)

VICTORY FOR CHRIST AND VICTORY IN CHRIST.

(Verses 37–50.)

We have here a picture,

I. Of Christ's victory over His foes.

"This Psalm looks beyond David. David and David's rule over the nations are but a type and image of Christ, and of that spiritual kingdom which He came to establish."—*Perowne*. We have suggested here, 1. The *completeness* of Christ's victory (ver. 37–42). All Christ's enemies are to be "put under His feet." And all of them com-

pletely under His feet. Many teachers, systems, institutions, which are proud enough now in their opposition to Christ, will be very low before Christ has done with them. The victories of the Church are perpetually stopping at certain points, and complete and permanent triumph seems scarcely ever attained. But let us not be discouraged; Christ shall ride on till the last foe has fallen. 2. The *rapidity* of

Christ's march. Up to a certain point David had to fight with varying fortune, but a time came when fighting was no longer necessary; a panic seized the hearts of the foe, and they melted away. Subsequent victories were won by the moral influence of the first victories. May it not be thus with the progress of Messiah's kingdom? Slowly has that kingdom seemed to prevail up to now; but, these preliminary struggles won, may not the triumphs of the Gospel be far more multiplied and swift? Satan shall "fall as lightning." 3. *The universality of Christ's reign* (ver. 43, 49). David ruling over Israel and over the heathen tribes, was a foreshadowing of Christ exalted over all the lands. Blessed are all those who submit to Christ. His conquest means freedom and life and glory to all who accept it. Alas! for those who will not have this man to rule over them.

Man or multitude, king or kingdom, whatever sets itself against the truth as it is in Jesus, must be broken.

Observe:

II. The saint's victory in Christ.

We may well see in David's triumph over his foes a picture of that spiritual triumph which Christ ensures to all his people. 1. Do not be content until *all* your sins are overcome. 2. Until all your sins are *utterly* vanquished. "Beat them small as the dust before the wind." 3. Until you have destroyed them *for ever*. Fight, until God crown you king to all eternity. (1.) *Fight in Christ*. Be sure of that. See that He girds you, leads you, saves you. (2.) *Put forth all personal effort*. David did not leave invisible powers to fight for him, but threw himself also into the fight. (3.) *Give God the glory of every victory* (ver. 49, 50).

PSALM XIX.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm instructs its readers in the glory and goodness of God; first, by directing their contemplation to the structure of the heavens, to the course of the sun, and to the kindly influences of its light and heat upon the earth; secondly, by inviting their attention to the revealed law, which is more especially adapted to impress them with a sense of God's superintending care, and to increase their understanding and knowledge of the Divine power and will. The psalm, therefore, divides itself into two parts; the first, extending to the 8th verse; and the second, comprising the remainder."—*Phillips*.

NATURAL THEOLOGY.

(Verses 1-7.)

The Psalmist here represents the universe as a grand cathedral in which the sun is the great preacher, ever declaring the glory of the Creator.

We notice:

I. The subject of the revelation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God." "The contemplation of the glory of nature must not lead to the deification of nature; it should lead up beyond the entire world, and beyond all the heavens, to the knowledge of the *glory of God* mirrored therein, and excite to the *adoration of the Almighty Creator* declaring Himself therein. The ex-

pause of the heavens which cannot at all be surveyed by man, has yet received its *limits* from Him who is alone Infinite and Almighty. Even the sun, which is worshipped by so many nations as the king of heaven, receives the measure of its motion, and the revolution of its course from the same hand, *whose government and work* disclose themselves in all things as by the hand of a Master, whom *all His works praise*."—*Moll*. We must not stop with nature, but see in her forces and glories the signs of a Divine existence and love. We must not survey the heavens, as some do, in a coarse

utilitarian spirit. The heavens reflect the Divine glory in their own glory. The colours in the heavens bear no discoverable relation to the utilitarian ends of light, they are a testimony to God's own love of beauty; incidental colours dashed into the creation without any direct bearing upon the known functions fulfilled by light; dashed in to tell us that God loves beauty, that He is full of it, and that these things are His own dim reflections. Nature declares the *wisdom, power, love, and faithfulness* of God. Some unbelieving men have dared to find fault with the works of God. One of these recently and blasphemously spoke of creation as a "blundering contrivance." But how poor are the grandest works of man when compared with the works of God! When the disturbed fairies left the palace they were building incomplete, the legend tells us that no architects or painters could be found to complete the edifice, such was the wondrous beauty of spiritual workmanship; but if God had left any portion of the universe incomplete, which of our critics would have finished it? Ah! we cannot rival the magnificent proportions, the exquisite balancings, the splendid hues, the perennial freshness and glory of creation.

II. The characteristics of the revelation. Mark 1. Its *fulness*. "Uttereth speech." "Pours forth speech."—*Kay*. It streams forth as from an overflowing spring, is the sense of the original. There are abundant evidences of God's power and glory. 2. Its *constancy* and *perpetuity*. The heavens are *declaring*—always declaring. "Day unto day," &c. "The idea of perpetuity is here. The words of this discourse of praise are carried forward in an uninterrupted line of transmission."—*Delitzsch*. 3. Its *variety*. *Day* and *night*, with their various phenomena. 4. Its *silence*. (Ver. 3.) Mark the unobtrusiveness of nature's deeper teachings. "Their 'voice is not heard,' lit. 'is inaudible.' They have a language, but not one that can be classed with any of the dialects of earth. They have a voice, but one that speaks not to the

ear, but to the devout and understanding heart."—*Perowne*. "The sense of the whole passage is this: that although the heavens are not endued with the power of human speech, yet the instruction which they convey is not less definite; the lessons which they teach are not, on that account, less clear and distinct to the intelligent and pious student of nature. The number and stupendous magnitude of the heavenly bodies; the sun which governs the day; the moon and stars, which render to man such important service by night; the clouds gathering water, which descends and refreshes the earth; the thunder and lightning, and the elements; all these preach to us as intelligibly as if they addressed us in our own language; and not only to us, but to all nations; the greatness and wisdom, the mercy and loving-kindness of Jehovah."—*Phillips*.

"The heavens articulately shine,
And speak their Architect Divine."

If we will know God in nature, we must have a seeing eye, and a hearing ear. "Holy silence itself is a speech, provided there be the ear to hear it."—*Tholuck*. 5. Its *universality* (ver. 4-7). "Their line," &c. Their measuring line extends to the confines of the earth. The glorious sun declares the glory of God all over the earth.

III. The importance of this revelation. Some Christians speak depreciatingly of nature, but it is a mistake. The Psalmist in this place declares the harmony of creation with the moral law. "The object of the psalm is not to contrast the moral and material revelations, but rather to identify their author and their subject. The doctrinal sum of the whole composition is, that the same God who reared the frame of nature is the giver of a law, and that this law is in all respects worthy of its author."—*Alexander*. The first part of the psalm treats of God in visible nature, the second, of God in moral law; and these two great ideas are ever needed to balance each other. If we think of God in nature only, and forget God as revealed in moral law, we glide into pantheism.

The most perfectly organised and commanding form of pantheism the world has ever seen (that of India), was growing up at the very moment David wrote, from this one-sidedness of view: the lights, the clouds, the winds of heaven, all manifestations of God, were being substituted for the moral essence of God itself, and becoming separate gods. On the other hand, contemplation of God as revealed in moral law, and forgetfulness of Him as revealed in nature, is apt to produce a narrow, cramped, and degenerate type of religion such as the Jews presented in their darkest and most exclusive moods. The two ideas will always be needed, the one to counterpoise the other; and David ever expresses the wisest and most far-reaching instincts of inspiration in putting them side by side.

IV. The limitation of this revelation.

As Lord Bacon says: "The heavens indeed tell of the glory of God, but not of His will, according to which the poet prays to be pardoned and sanctified."—*Delitzsch*. Lord Bacon's "*Prayer*." "I have delighted in the brightness of Thy temple. *Thy creatures have been my books; but Thy Scriptures much more.* I have sought Thee in the courts, fields, and gardens; I have found thee in Thy temples." Fallen man needs the truth of God bringing home to him, with a clearness that nature cannot accomplish. And we need many truths of

which nature *knows nothing*. "There is this great difference between God's book of nature and His book of grace. The one, splendid and glorious as its Almighty Maker, was formed for man in innocency, and is imperfectly adapted to a fallen state; the other is suited to a corrupt nature, and, telling of mercy, addresses itself to its wants, and speaks with a Divine power which refuses to be silenced or passed by."—*Ryland*.

Lessons:

1. We need never fear that the true religion of nature will lead us away from God.

2. The believer in God alone apprehends the highest glory and significance of nature. "None save a believer can rightly meditate on the works of God. Worldly men may, and do, understand and admire the wonderful works of God; the lover of science can truly estimate the wisdom and the beauty which pervade all nature; who else, indeed, can so well do it? But unassisted, man rests there; his thoughts go no further. It is 'by faith that we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear;' and thus the mind is led from nature up to nature's God."—*Ryland*.

3. The believer finding deep joy in the workmanship of God, finds full satisfaction only in turning to that moral law which is the revelation of God's nature.

THE SOUL-RESTORING POWER OF LAW.

(Verse 7.)

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "The same Almighty Hand which had given the sun his light-giving, life-sustaining power in the physical world, had provided life and light also for the spiritual world."—*Kay*.

Mark:

I. The attribute of the law. It is "perfect." The law of God, the moral law, as given in the whole of the Scriptures, is *perfect*, i.e., free from all defect or blemish. It is spotless. 1. It is the

It is the exact expression of God's moral nature. The earth is a reflection of God's metaphysical glory—it tells us of His eternal power and Godhead; but the revelation of God's will in moral law is the revelation of His highest nature and glory. As such a revelation it is "perfect." It is not mixed and marred like the words of men; it is a stainless mirror reflecting the sublime holiness of the deity. It is the picture of God drawn by His own hand. It is "light, and in it is no darkness at all."

2. It is the perfect theory of the good of

man. "The divine law is called 'perfect,' i.e., spotless and harmless, as being absolutely well-meaning, and altogether directed towards the wellbeing of man."
—*Delitzsch*.

Through the disorder of our nature we regard moral law as our great enemy, as that which stands in the way of our freedom and our joy, but really it presents us with the grand secret of living and immortal good.

II. The effect of the law. "Converting the soul." Paul tells us in the Romans how the law condemns, how it threatens, how it kills. And this is the effect of the law as considered in itself. But we must remember that when the Psalmist is speaking here of the law, he comprehends in it the promises of God, and regards it in connection with the great system of sacrifices. The evangelical idea is included in the views of law which he gives us in this psalm. "If the law is separated from the hope of forgiveness and the Spirit of Christ, it

is so far from the sweetness of honey, that it rather kills poor souls by its bitterness." — *Calvin*. Thus understood, the law "revives the soul." 1. *It brings back the soul to God*. "It calls it back from its wanderings by reminding it of its ingratitude, by setting before it its high destiny, by bringing it to its true Shepherd and Guardian." — *Perowne*. Having restored the soul to God, 2. *The law strengthens and perfects it*. The law harmonises, vivifies, strengthens, rejoices, the whole moral man. "It gives the same support to the mind that food does to the body when exhausted (Lam. i. 11. See also Ps. xxiii. 3; Prov. xxv. 13)." — *French*. "The word here translated 'restoring' is used of restoring from disorder and decay (Ps. lxxx. 19), from sorrow and affliction (Ruth iv. 15), from death (1 Kings xvii. 21, 22)." — *Kay*. The perfect law makes those who receive it faultless.

THE LIGHT-GIVING POWER OF THE LAW.

(Verse 7.)

"The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Observe:

I. The infallibility of the law. "The testimony of the Lord is sure." "Testimony, i.e. revealed will. Probably the two tables of the *testimony*, containing the decalogue, are here especially referred to." — *French*. But we must understand the moral law as a whole. This law is sure, or, true. It is true, therefore, sure. "It is raised above all doubt in its declarations, and verifying itself in its threatenings and promises." — *Delitzsch*. We want a doctrine that is infallible; speculative and unverified teaching we feel to be untrustworthy and powerless. 1. We cannot believe in the infallibility of the Church. One Pope contradicts another; the same Pope is inconsistent with himself. Neither, 2. In the infallibility of philosophers. The faith of one generation of thinkers is laughed at by the next. Neither, 3. In the infallibility of

ourselves, of our personal opinions and convictions arrived at outside revelation. There is no infallible guide but the moral law declared on Sinai and developed in Holy Writ. We must not live according to the maxims of men, neither must we make intuitions and inward impressions our rule of action, but prayerfully seek light on the holy oracles, and God will not permit us to wander into false ways.

II. The subjects of its illumination. "Making wise the simple." "The simple, lit. 'the open,' not here 'the foolish' as often in Proverbs, but he who is ready to become a fool, that he may be wise, who has the true child-like spirit (Matt. xi. 25; 1 Cor. i. 27), which best fits him to become a disciple in the school of God." — *Perowne*. 1. We must feel our need of guidance. 2. We must be sincere and open in our search for instruction. 3. We must be fully prepared to obey the light as it is given.

THE JOY-GIVING POWER OF THE LAW.

(Verse 8.)

"The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart."

If our moral life attain to completeness, we shall observe in it three stages in relation to the law of God.

I. The period of rebellion against the law.

In our original, natural state, we fret against God's commandments. There is a twofold reason for this.

1. We rebel against the law *because it denies us certain gratifications which we covet*. Our irregular desires lead us to covet what the law denies. But,

2. We rebel against the law chiefly *because it is the law*. We dislike the law because it is the will of another asserting itself above our will. We resent the law not only because it sometimes comes between our passion and its gratification, but because of its dogmatism. Our will shall be supreme; we will be our own law. The "carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be."

This is life's first stage. Law is a tyranny we resent. Next comes,

II. The period of submission to the law.

We come to the conviction that it is better to submit than to rebel; we cease to be God's enemies, and become His servants. We painfully keep the law, but cannot be said to love it. There is a constant friction. Then comes,

III. The period of joy in the law.

In ancient times laws were put into verse, and there comes a period, if we live rightly, when God's laws become poetry to us,—the statute becomes a song. Holiness becomes beauty to the eye, sweetness to the taste, music to the

ear. God's law, the grand expression of God's nature, becomes the great object of our love and desire! "I delight to do Thy will, O God." Philosophers rejoice in natural law,—they are never weary of celebrating the glorious reign of law, and to discover law and extol it, is considered the highest intellectual triumph. But to admire the moral law, the law which denies so much that we like, and enjoins so much that we do not like, this is, indeed, the triumph of life. If the statutes of the Lord are to rejoice our heart, (1.) We must know them better. The more clearly we perceive the nature of the Divine law, the more we approve of it. "Open Thou mine eyes that I may see wonderful things out of Thy law." (2.) We must grow in love. A growing love turns law into music. What is painful to dry reason, the heart makes light. (3.) We must be obedient. Every act of obedience makes the next act more easy, until at last what was forced and painful becomes instinctive and delightful.

Lessons:

1. In keeping the law of God, we find true delight. "The statutes of the Lord are right." How fatal such a severe, inexorable, unyielding law to happiness! No; to keep the law of God, which is given in all its fulness in Jesus Christ, is the secret of sublime content. Let believers not rest until they realise this high condition. We praise God because He is good; but not enough because He is righteous. We obey the law because it is safe; but do not sufficiently find liberty and joy in it. 2. There is no real satisfaction except in keeping the statutes of God.

THE PURIFYING POWER OF THE LAW.

(Verse 8.)

"The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." The idea here is that the spotless law imparts to

us its Divine quality, and thus fills the soul with vision and joy. Inquire,

I. How the law makes us pure? It

does this—1. By setting before us a pure ideal. It brings all heaven before our eyes, and there is something impulsive in the very spectacle of perfection. 2. By awakening in our soul passionate desires for purity. 3. By strengthening us to reach the highest planes of life. Show,

II. How this purity is the source of spiritual strength, joy, and vision. 1. *Strength.* "There is an allusion here to the dimness of the eyes produced by extreme weakness and approaching death, recovery from which is figura-

tively represented as an enlightening of the eyes."—*Alexander*. Sin and corruption mean weakness, but the truth of God in Christ brings to the soul newness of life. Purity is another word for power. 2. *Joy.* Dimness of eyes means sorrow; enlightening the eyes means the return of gladness. Impurity means disorder and misery; purity means harmony and brightness. 3. *Vision.* Our bewilderments spring from our passions. Purity is vision. "The pure in heart shall see God."

THE ABSOLUTE PERFECTION OF THE LAW.

(Verses 9-11.)

Consider :

I. The incomparable excellence of the law as considered in itself (ver. 9).

1. The *purity* of the law. "The fear of the Lord is clean." The commandments which teach the fear of the Lord are without any admixture of error or unrighteousness. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." (1.) The moral law as contained in the Scriptures contains no false principle of conduct or action. (2.) The moral law as given in the Scriptures is no lower form of morality for an imperfect civilisation, but the absolute law for the highest creatures and the highest worlds. (3.) The moral law is not merely correct in the main, but all and every of its special requirements are just and righteous. 2. The *stability* of the law. "Enduring for ever." It is changeless and everlasting. The moral law continues. The ceremonial law was abrogated—it served its purpose, and ceased to be; civil law is susceptible to continual modifications; natural law will be changed, for the sun and sky and planets shall be dissolved in fire; but moral law abides firm as the throne of God. "Not one jot or tittle of it shall perish."

II. The incomparable excellence of the law considered in its relation to those who keep it. 1. *Intellectually* considered it is of supreme excellence. "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold." This seems

to point to the mental appreciation of the truth. *More* than gold, than *fine* gold, than *much* fine gold. They will do that for us which gold cannot do. 2. *Emotionally* it is. "Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Experimentally it is unutterably grateful, filling the soul with sweetness. *Sweeter* than honey and the *droppings of the comb*. More grateful than all the pleasures of sense. "What wonder is it that this converting, instructing, exhilarating, enlightening, eternal, true, and righteous Word should be declared preferable to the riches of eastern kings, and sweeter to the soul of the pious believer than the sweetest thing we know of is to the bodily taste? How ready we are to acknowledge all this! Yet the next hour, perhaps, we part with the true riches to obtain the earthly mammon, and barter away the joys of the spirit for the gratification of sense! Lord, give us affections towards Thy Word in some measure proportionate to its excellence; for we can never love too much what we can never admire enough."—*Horne*. Dr. Duncan said a little before his death: "I wish I had a little more personal faith. I think with the Psalmist that these things are more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold; but I cannot go so well with him in that, 'they are sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' I stick at that; that has often been a plague with me; the precious things

were more as casketed jewels than as meat and drink. They delight the intellect; but, oh! I wish I had a loving heart! I go mourning all the day for want of it." 3. *Practically* it is (ver. 11). The twofold province of revealed law. It is to *preserve*. It admonishes, points out peril, and saves. A miner's safety-lamp was brought out some time ago, which, besides serving the purpose of an ordinary safety-lamp, sounds a note of warning to the workmen the moment the air around becomes so charged with fire-damp as to be dangerous or explosive. Thus the Word, which is a lamp unto our feet, gives a timely note of warning lest we fall into temptation and sin. And in the

keeping of it there is great *reward*. It is true that in the *end* it will bring us great recompense. "The Hebrew word signifies *the last, the end of a thing*; and thence it may signify reward, as the consequence or result of an action."—*Phillips* But this is hardly the truth intended here. "In the act of keeping them—not merely as the consequence of doing so."—*Kay*. "Not only for keeping, but in keeping of them. As every flower hath its sweet smell, so every good action hath its sweet reflection upon the soul."—*Trapp*.

"The work of righteousness is peace:
The great reward's already given;
And all Thy servants, Lord, confess
Obedient love is present heaven."

SECRET FAULTS.

(Verse 12.)

Let us consider what these secret faults are, and our duty in the recollection of them:

I. The sins known to ourselves, but not known to the world. There is a certain portion of our life which is sheltered from the popular gaze. There is a certain privacy left us, so that God may put us to the test as to how far we are good because the world looks at us, and how far we are good because He looks at us. How have we acted here? How acted when free from the criticisms of society? Is it not true that we are often more pure before men than before God? We put the best side of everything to the world: but this is more true of our characters than it is of anything else. How carefully we veil our faults from our neighbour! our schemes of pride! our unspoken anger! our fits of envy! our greed of gold! our stained imaginations! And thus it comes to pass that good men think worse of themselves than society does. When, on a certain festive occasion, Pestalozzi, the German philanthropist, was presented with a wreath, he put it gently away, saying, "Crowns are not for me, but for the innocent." The best of men have ever had the feeling that if the

world knew them better it would praise them less.

II. The sins known to the world, but not to us. We see sins that the world cannot see; they see sins we do not see. How often men are egregiously mistaken concerning themselves and their doings! And this applies, perhaps, more to character than it does to anything else. Individuals move amongst us, in whose countenance, in whose eye, we behold the evidence of a fatal disease, and yet they see it not; and thus we often see in those with whom we have to do evidences of moral disorder and imperfection which they apprehend not, or apprehend very imperfectly. We may be very sure that our friends see similar faults in us. The portrait our friends paint of us is very different from that rose-coloured picture we draw of ourselves.

III. The sins neither known to us, nor to the world, but which are known to God. There are depths of evil in us with which we have but the slightest acquaintance. As *Alexander Smith* says, "What strangers we are to ourselves. In every man's nature there is an interior unexplored as that of Africa, and over that region what wild beasts may

roam." "The perfection and spirituality of God's law render it almost impossible for a fallen son of Adam ever to know all the innumerable instances of his transgressing it. Add to which, that false principles and inveterate prejudices make us regard many things as innocent, and some things as laudable, which, in the eye of heaven, are far otherwise. Self-examination is a duty which few practise as they ought to do: and he who practises it best will always have reason to conclude his particular confessions with this genial petition, 'Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.'"

—*Horne*. To society we wear a mask, to ourselves a veil, but to God's eye neither mask nor veil, for our iniquities are set before Him, our secret sins in the light of His countenance. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Learn,

1. To recognise the reality and guilt of our secret sinfulness. These secret sins are real sins. "These faults are of daily and hourly incursion, involuntary and unavoidable infirmities, yet are they sins properly so called; and we must be cleansed from them by the merit and Spirit of Christ."—*Trapp*. "No one is to plead as an excuse, or to justify themselves by the secrecy and delicacy of many sins, the unfathomableness of the

human heart, the impossibility of a complete knowledge of self and sin."—*Moll*. Our secret faults make us *weak*. They rob our character of *beauty*, as a flower fades when a worm is at the root. They are likely to become *manifest* faults. As *Bishop Hopkin*s says: "The least sin, if let alone in the heart, will, like a small speck in fruit, spread to a total rottenness." Our secret faults will confront us at *the bar of God*. "He shall bring every thought into judgment, with every secret thing."

2. To seek forgiveness and cleansing from this secret sinfulness. "*Clear* thou me from hidden faults." "The word translated *clear* is borrowed from the law, and means not so much to cleanse by renovation of the heart, as to acquit by a judicial sentence. (See *Exod. xxxiv. 7*; *Num. xiv. 18*.) Such an acquittal, in the case of sinners against God, involves the idea of a free forgiveness."—*Alexander*. Let us seek this forgiveness, but let us seek also the *cleansing grace*. Ver. 14.

"But who can all his errors tell,
Or count the thoughts by which he fell?
Omniscient God, to Thee alone
My sin's infinity is known!
Do Thou my secret faults efface,
And show forth all Thy cleansing grace."

Law goes further than our power of introspection, and the cleansing power must go deeper than our own insight.

PRESUMPTUOUS SINS.

(Verse 13.)

Let us inquire:

I. What these sins are? Deliberate, wilful, and high-handed sins. "Wilful, insolent ones."—*Kay*. "Divines have distinguished sin into three kinds; called sins of ignorance, sins of infirmity, and sins of presumption. The will is supposed to concur more or less in all, otherwise they could not be sins; but they have their names from what is most prevailing and predominant in each. If there be more of ignorance than wilfulness in it, it is a sin of ignorance; if there be more of infirmity than wilfulness in it, it is a sin of

infirmity; but if there be more of wilfulness than of either, or both the former, it is then a wilful sin; and that is what the text calls presumptuous sin."—*Waterland*. These are sins of scarlet dye—sins evidently against reason, conscience, society.

II. Out of what they arise? The order observed by the Psalmist is most instructive—first secret faults, then presumptuous sins. The latter arise out of the former. We ignore our secret sins, and they are uncared for, unrepented of, unstriven against, and they develop into bold and outrageous sin. Let us watch

the first strayings of our heart from God and righteousness. Not all at once do men become open and high-handed sinners. We observe :

III. The dark tyranny they exercise. "Let them not have dominion over me." *Dr. Phillips* translates this : "From the proud, i.e., from tyrannical or haughty governors. This is much better than to render it by *presumptuous sins*." But this translation has not the sanction of the great commentators. *Alexander* says : "The Hebrew word properly denotes proud men, but seems to be here applied to sins by a strong personification." "*Keep thy servant from presumptuous, or wilful sin* ; literally, from proud, presumptuous, insolent ones, the tyrants of the soul (Num. xv. 17-31) ; let them not have dominion over me."—*Wordsworth*. When sin comes to this pass it is hard to be repented of. It is hard to renounce. The soul is at the mercy of sin. Like tyrannical governors oppressing a captured city, so does sin triumph and grind down the soul. It is comparatively easy to shake off faults whilst yet incipient, private, and occasional ; but they have become tyrants whose yoke it is well nigh impossible to shake off when they have developed into habitual, open, shameless sins. The sinner, then, is the slave of imperious lusts. Observe :

IV. The absolute sin in which they culminate. "Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." "The great apostasy." The idea is, that wilful sins extinguish God's Spirit within us. The unpardonable sin. Secret sins lead to open sin ; and open sin indulged in, persevered in, leads to the great transgression—the quenching of the Spirit, and final apostasy from God.

1. Let us beware of secret faults.

2. Let us beware of presumptuous sins. There are no sins so dark and awful but we are capable of them. Let us watch and tremble lest we should fall into those insolent, defiant sins which provoke the mighty and glorious Being who has set His glory above the heavens.

3. Let us live in dependence upon Divine aid. "Keep back thy servant." Cry mightily to God for preventing grace.

4. Let us seek for entire sanctification of spirit (ver. 14). It were vain, indeed, for a man to seek to purify his own heart, but David sees in God his Strength and Deliverer. Christ delivers from sin ; His Spirit purifies the heart ; and that Spirit preserves us with garments unspotted from the world.

PSALM XX.

INTRODUCTION.

"This is evidently a liturgical psalm, and was intended originally, it would seem, to be sung on behalf of a king who was about to go forth to war against his enemies. As the king stands within the sanctuary offering his sacrifice, the whole assembled crowd of worshippers in the spacious courts lift up their voices in the prayer, that Jehovah would graciously accept those sacrifices, and send him help and victory in the battle. The psalm has no doubt a prophetic aspect, from the fact that the Jewish king was, by virtue of his office, a type of Christ. Calvin is right in saying that inasmuch as this kingdom differed from all other kingdoms, because God had determined to govern and defend His people by the hand of David and of his seed, therefore we ought to recognise, under the type of the temporal kingdom, that better rule on which the joy and happiness of the Church depend."—*Perowne*.

THE NAME OF JEHOVAH.

(Verses 1, 5, 7.)

I. The name of Jehovah a consolation in trouble. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble ; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee" (ver. 1).

No character or rank is exempt from the ills of life. The highest dignity cannot guard off troubles ; and crowns especially are often lined with thorns.

The history of David records many a dark day and sorrowful night. It was a day of distress with Jacob when he fled from his brother Esau, and arrived at Bethel a distracted wanderer (Gen. xxxv. 3). Few plants, says an old writer, have both the morning and the evening sun; and an older than he has said—Man is born to trouble. But in the deepest, darkest, wildest distress Jehovah is the refuge of His people; and His name soothes the keenest anguish, and lifts up the most despairing.

“Thy mighty name salvation is,
And keeps my happy soul above;
Comfort it brings, and power, and peace,
And joy, and everlasting love.”

II. The name of Jehovah an inspiring battle-cry. “In the name of our God we will set up our banners” (ver. 5). Banners are a part of military equipage, borne in times of war to assemble, direct, distinguish, and inspire, the soldiers. They have been often used in religious ceremonies. It is the practice of some people to erect a banner in honour of their deity. In a certain part of Thibet it is customary for a priest to ascend a hill every month, to set up a white flag, and perform some religious ceremonies to conciliate the favour of a dewta, or invisible being, who is the presiding genius of the place. The Hindoos describe Siva the Supreme as having a banner in the celestial world. Every nation has its own expressive battle-cry. “For hearth and home” was the cry that found a deep and warm response in the breast of the ancient Roman; and, in modern times, the Germans roused the enthusiasm and

bravery of every soldier by the cry of “Fatherland!” But the militant Church goes to war with the name of the Lord of Hosts on her banners—a battle-cry which inspires every heart with holy courage, and binds it with the cincture of a firm, unalterable purpose. It was this that nerved the youthful David with a giant’s prowess in his victorious combat with Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 45).

III. The name of Jehovah the strength of the Militant Church. “We will remember the name of the Lord our God” (ver. 7). The world trusts in the material—in rifles, mitrailleuse, turret-ships, and torpedoes; but the Church is taught to trust in the spiritual—the mysterious, invisible, but almighty power of Jehovah. The material fails; but the spiritual never. Many a formidable and rarely-equipped army has

“Melted like snow in the glance of the Lord,” while the feeble and despised champions of the Church have stood forth in all the honour and lustre of victory. When the saint relies fully on Jehovah, and is absorbed in His holy cause, he is surrounded with an impenetrable defence. Numa, being told that his enemies were coming upon him as he was offering sacrifice, thought it was sufficient for his safety that he could say, I am about the service of my God; and yet how slow men are to put their trust in that Name where alone all true comfort, the holiest courage, and the mightiest strength are found! It is easy, says Arnot, to persuade papists to lean on priests and saints, on old rags and painted pictures, on any idol; but it is hard to get a Protestant to trust in the living God.

PRAYER A PREPARATION FOR CONFLICT.

(Verses 1-5, 9.)

I. Prayer should have reference to future emergencies. “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble” (ver. 1). War is a time of trouble, both to king and people; and considering the vicissitudes and sufferings of the battlefield, it is wise to implore the aid of

Heaven for seasons when earthly resources may be exhausted. Prayer has a prevenient power. To-day’s prayers can help to-morrow’s; the congregation’s present prayers, the king’s future prayers. Prayer may bring present power that shall put the man’s heart

right, and keep it right, so that when the hour of need shall come, the prayer of his heart may be right prayer, and be both heard and answered. "Troubles roar like thunder; but the believer's voice will be heard above the storm."

II. Prayer invokes the invincible protection of Jehovah. "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee" (ver. 1). By the name is signified the whole revealed character of Jehovah. He is called the God of Jacob, because He manifested Himself as such, in a fulness of deeds, to Jacob and to his posterity. A heavenlier light is needed to explain all the mystery and glory of the Divine name. There is power in the historical associations of the name to help faith, as the pleading soul recalls the scenes of Bethel, Peniel, Padan-aram, Shechem, and Egypt. The name of Jehovah is an inviolable protection. "Defend thee"—exalt thee—"to be upraised to a high and fortified place, made safe."—*Bythner*. "Set thee up on high," i.e., "as in a fortress where no enemy can do thee harm, or on a rock at the foot of which the waves fret and dash themselves in impotent fury."—*Perowne*. The name of God is a more secure retreat than the spot defended by parks of artillery.

III. Prayer should be accompanied with sacrifice. "Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice" (ver. 3). It was customary in ancient times for warriors to offer sacrifice before going into battle; and this was often done with most imposing ceremony, and with lavish liberality. "Thy burnt sacrifice"—thy holocaust, "a sacrifice of quadrupeds and birds, which are raised altogether upon the altar and burned: the Greek hecatomb seems borrowed from this."—*Bythner*. "Accept"—graciously accept—literally, *make fat*; in a declarative sense "regard as fat," and so "receive as fat," i.e., "as worthy to be offered, the fattest of the flock being chosen for sacrifice."—*Perowne*. "At the present day others as well as David may use this psalm in prayer, for as the person, the circumstances, the time and place, are all different in the new law, so likewise is

the sacrifice; but one faith and one spirit abide through all ages, and amid all diversities of places, works, persons. The external varies, the internal remains ever the same."—*Luther*. The individual relation to God is recognised by personal offerings. The separate application of the one sacrifice answers to the separate sacrifices of old. The one sacrifice must have its separate acceptance for the separate individual. Prayer to be efficacious must ever be offered in the spirit of sacrifice.

IV. Prayer is urgent to secure a specific answer to its petitions.

1. *As they relate to special blessings.* "Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel: the Lord fulfil all thy petitions" (ver. 4, 5). Prayer is offered for protection in time of danger, for wisdom to adopt and execute the best measures in the emergencies of war, and for victory over the enemy. Our desires and counsels are completely dependent upon God for their attainment, and ought to be prayers. The more clearly we see our peril, and the more pungently we feel our need, the more fervently do we wrestle for an answer to our petitions. "Sometimes God doth not only grant a man's prayer, but fulfilleth his counsel; that is, in that very way, by that very means, which his judgment pitched upon his thoughts."—*Trapp*.

2. *As they relate to their immediate subject.* "Save, Lord; let the king hear us when we call" (ver. 9). Rendered by the LXX., "O Lord, save the king, and hear us when we call upon Thee." The king is the subject of prayer, that he may be blessed with victory, and that he may be a blessing to others. The ninth verse is a summary of the whole psalm. The wellbeing of a people is suspended on the character and doings of the monarch. Prayer should be offered for him continually that he may be guarded from evil, that he may be wise, equitable, and prosperous. Prayer must not be intermitted even when confidence of Divine help has been inspired. Prayer will still be necessary to sustain that confidence in its trials, for the very

confidence is a contingent virtue, and, perhaps, the more subject to risks of deterioration, because it is an inspired thing and not a thing of earth.

V. Answer to prayer is found wherever the presence of Jehovah is manifested. "Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion" (ver. 2). The Jews, whose weakness found it so difficult a task to look up to the Invisible God, were favoured with a visible sanctuary on Zion; thither the devout Israelite directed his prayer; thence he expected help in the day of trouble. Christ is now the sanctuary of His people; and in their worshipping assemblies He is wont to manifest His presence and power. The greatest distress is experienced when God is absent. His return banishes our fears, and nerves us with

superhuman bravery. "Men of the world despise sanctuary help; but our hearts have learned to prize it beyond all material aid. They seek help out of the armoury, or the treasury, or the buttry; but we turn to the sanctuary. Certain advertisers recommend a strengthening plaster; but nothing can give such strength to the loins of a saint as waiting upon God in the assemblies of His people."—*Spurgeon*. God always puts honour upon His appointed services. His help, when it comes, will come by the way of the sanctuary and out of Zion. The faith to which that help is a response, wherever exercised, was first begotten amid the holy things of the sanctuary. The help has the same stamp as the faith that commands it, the stamp of the sanctuary.

CONFIDENCE IN JEHOVAH THE PLEDGE OF VICTORY.

(Verses 5-8.)

I. Confidence in Jehovah fills the heart with gladness. "We will rejoice in Thy salvation" (ver. 5). The people are so assured of the help of God as to break out in a song of anticipatory triumph. Praise raises the moral tone of an army, and it is on this that its success largely depends. Jehoshaphat, before entering into battle with the vast armies of the Moabites and Ammonites, appointed singers to praise the Lord. He obtained an easy victory (2 Chron. xx. 20-22). When Louis XIII. of France had invested with his army a city of the Huguenots, the besieged assembled one evening on the city wall and sang, with great sweetness and solemnity, one of their favourite psalms. The king was so impressed with the whole scene and with the spirit of the singers, that he turned to Mazarin, his favourite general, who was by his side, and quietly observed, "We can do nothing with this people." The siege was raised; and the persecuted Huguenots triumphed in their Lord. God ought to be remembered in our triumph as well as in our need. We are sometimes so much

elated by the triumph as to forget the help by which it has come.

II. Confidence in Jehovah inspires with courage for the conflict. "In the name of our God will we set up" — wave—"our banners" (ver. 5). When the army has confidence in its General it unfurls its standard with resolute defiance, enters upon the contest with a stout, brave heart, and already anticipates the shouts of victory and the triumphant procession, with banners displayed. "Great certainly is the faith which hath such courage by remembering the name of the Lord. Soldiers in our day are wont, when they go into battle, to recall to mind the brave exploits of their fathers, or former victories, and the like, wherewith to warm and stir their hearts. But let our princes remember the name of God, wherein all salvation and victory do stand."—*Luther*. "Confession of Christ, as the only name whereby we can be saved, is the banner which distinguishes His faithful people. Oh, that this confession were more distinct, more pure, more zealous, then would His followers be more united, more bold,

more successful—terrible as an army with banners.”—*W. Wilson.*

III. Confidence in Jehovah secures the exercise of His Almighty power. “Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed: He will hear him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand” (ver. 6). Prayer ought never to stop before it has brought a present sense of help. It is possible to have an inspoken answer to our prayers before the outward crisis to which we are looking has come. “The hope suddenly changes into certainty. *Now know I* that Jehovah *hath* saved, *hath* given the victory. The singer speaks in the full assurance of faith that the prayer is heard, and as if he already saw the victory gained. The prayer had been that God would hear and send help from the *earthly* sanctuary or Zion. Now, the answer is to come from His holy *heaven*. For if God then condescended to dwell in visible glory among men, yet He would teach His people that He is not limited by the bounds of time and space. He is not like the gods of the heathen, the god of one city or country. He sends help out of Zion, but the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. Calvin sees expressed in the earthly sanctuary made by hands, the grace and condescension of God to His people; in the heavenly, His infinite power, greatness, and majesty.”—*Perowne.* Faith, says Quesnel, seems to put the Almighty power of God into the hands of man; whereas unbelief seems to tie up even the hands of the Almighty.

IV. Confidence in Jehovah exposes the inadequacy of the best human contrivances. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (ver. 7). The remark of a great warrior, that Providence is always on the side of the strongest battalion, may be applauded as an evidence of military penetration, but the sceptical sneer is

none the less apparent in the sentiment. According to the law, Israel was forbidden to maintain a standing army. They were taught to trust in God, both for defence and victory (Deut. xx. 2-4; xxxii. 30). Some of the conquests of the chosen people were gained by means which contradicted and defied the ordinary rules of warfare, and seemed absurd to the believer in military skill and prowess. Moral power was pitted against the material, and won the day, as it ever will. When the Israelites depended more upon their armies than their God, they suffered the most humiliating defeats. “The most dreaded war-engine of David’s day was the war-chariot, armed with scythes which mowed men down like grass: this was the boast and glory of the neighbouring nations; but the saints considered the name of Jehovah to be a far better defence.”

V. Confidence in Jehovah turns apparent defeat into victory. “They are brought down and fallen; but we are risen and stand upright” (ver. 8). The prophetic vision of faith already sees the issue of the conflict. The ranks of those who trust in chariots and horses, who rely on material aid, seem firm, impenetrable, defiant, and the onset irresistible. But the people of God, whose trust is in the unseen, and who seem overwhelmed and put to the worse, rise up triumphant, while their enemies are brought down and crushed—the instruments of war in which they trusted helping to make their ruin more complete. Faith has surer wheels than pride; and prayer will carry us where power must fall. “Faith alone, which commits itself to God, can sing the song of triumph before the victory, and raise the shout of joy before help has been obtained; for to faith all is permitted. It trusts in God, and so really has what it believes, because faith deceives not; as it believes, so is it done.”—*Luther.*

PSALM XXI.

INTRODUCTION.

"The prayer which the Church offers up at the conclusion of the preceding psalm now issues in a hymn of praise, the result of a believing view of the glory which is to follow, when Messiah's sufferings are ended. This is one of the beautiful songs of which we find many in Scripture, prepared by the Holy Spirit to awaken and enliven the hopes and expectations of the Church while she waits for the Lord, and to give utterance to her joy at the time of His arrival. The theme is Messiah's exaltation and glory, and the time chosen for its delivery is just the moment when darkness covered the earth, and all nature seemed about to die with its expiring Lord. Scripture deals largely in contrasts. It seems to be suitable to the human mind to turn from one extreme to another. Man can endure any change, however violent and contradictory, but a long continuance, a sameness either of joy or sorrow, has a debilitating and depressing effect."—*Ryland*.

THE JOY OF THE HEAVENLY KING.

(Verses 1-7.)

I. This joy arose from a consciousness of newly achieved victory. "In Thy salvation how greatly shall He rejoice" (ver. 1).

1. *This victory was achieved by supernatural power.* "In Thy strength, O Lord" (ver. 1). The Man of sorrows, as He entered into the stern conflict with evil, knew full well the victory could not be gained by the ordinary tactics of military genius, or by the prowess of a human arm. He relied on the strength of Jehovah, and not in vain: He emerged from the dark, fierce contest, an exultant conqueror. How often do we fail in the great battle of life by being too self-reliant; and in proportion to our blind confidence in an arm of flesh is the humiliation and misery of our defeat! "Our weakness unstrings our harps, but His strength tunes them anew. If we cannot sing a note in honour of our own strength, we can at any rate rejoice in our omnipotent God." The salvation of humanity is a Divine work, and will be to myriads the source of ceaseless and ever-increasing joy.

2. *This victory was granted in answer to earnest prayer.* "Thou hast given Him His heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of His lips" (ver. 2). On the lonely shore, among the silent hills or under the shadows of the solitary garden, the Messiah poured out His soul in earnest prayer for strength to suffer and to prevail on behalf of His people; and He was heard and marvellously answered. "What is in the

well of the heart is sure to come up in the bucket of the lips; and those are the only true prayers where the heart's desire is first, and the lips' request follows after. The requests of the Saviour were not withheld. He was and still is a prevailing pleader. Our Advocate on high returns not empty from the throne of grace."—*Spurgeon*. The agony of wrestling prayer is often turned into the rapture of success. The last psalm, says Perowne, was a litany before the king went forth to battle. This is apparently a *Te Deum* on his return.

II. This joy was accelerated by possessing an affluence of Divine Blessing.

1. *He was surrounded with evidences of the Divine Beneficence.* "Thou preventest Him with the blessings of goodness." To *prevent* signifies to anticipate, to go before. "Thou goest before Him with the blessings of Thy goodness as a pioneer, to make crooked ways straight and rough places smooth; or as one who strews flowers in the path of another, to render the way beautiful to the eye and pleasant to the tread. God's gifts are God's love embodied and expressed. And this greatly enhances the value of our blessings—that they are cups as full of God and of God's kindness as of happiness and blessedness."—*S. Martin*.

2. *He was invested with the most illustrious dignity.* "Thou settest a crown of pure gold on His head. His glory is great in Thy salvation: honour and majesty hast Thou laid upon Him" (ver. 3, 5). Jesus wore the thorn-crown,

but now wears the glory-crown. It is a *crown*, indicating royal nature, imperial power, deserved honour, glorious conquest, and Divine government. The *crown of pure gold* has respect to His exaltation at the right hand of God, where He is crowned with glory and honour; and this crown being of pure gold denotes the purity, glory, solidity, and perpetuity of His kingdom. The diadems of earthly monarchs are liable to be suddenly displaced; but this crown is set upon the head of the Redeemer so firmly that no power can remove it. "Honour and majesty"—as Parkhurst reads—*splendour and beauty*—"hast Thou laid upon Him." As the wood of the tabernacle was overlaid with pure gold, so is Jesus covered with honour and glory.—*Spurgeon*, in loco. "Were there ten thousand millions of heavens created above these highest heavens, and again as many above them, and as many above them, till angels were wearied with counting, it were but too low a seat to fix the princely throne of that Lord Jesus above them all."—*Rutherford*.

3. *He enjoyed the consciousness of an imperishable life* (ver. 4). "Even length of days for ever and ever." The lavish endowments of God often exceed our greatest petitions and loftiest hopes. Jesus, as man, asked for life, and He was heard in that He feared. He was raised from the dead, to die no more. The power of God and all His moral attributes secure the perpetuity of the life of the risen and exalted Saviour. He was endowed with *length of days for ever and ever*—"the prolonged ages of this world which the Church was to have, and after them an eternity, world without end."

4. *He became the source of endless blessing to others*. "For Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever" (ver. 6). Messiah is the source whence all blessings for time and for eternity shall be derived. He is an overflowing well-spring of blessing to others, a sun filling the universe with light. In and through Him all nations of the earth are blessed. True blessedness is found, not in accumulating riches, not in the weary, tread-

mill circle of philosophic research, not in travel and commune with Nature in her varying moods: it is found only in Christ. And yet men, in seeking for the streams of bliss, wander from its source.

5. *He exults in the Divine favour*. "Thou hast made Him exceeding glad with Thy countenance" (ver. 6). "Though this be metaphorically used for *favour*, yet is the speech not all metaphor, and that well-experienced Christians will tell you. The countenance of God makes the Prince of Heaven glad: how ought we to seek it, and how careful should we be lest we should provoke Him by our sins to hide His face from us! Our anticipations may cheerfully fly forward to the hour when the joy of our Lord shall be shed abroad on all the saints, and the countenance of Jehovah shine on all the blood-bought."—*Spurgeon*.

III. This joy was intensified by the assurance of the unshakeable permanency of is government.

1. *The permanency of Messiah's throne is secured by the Divine mercy*. "Through the mercy of the Most High He shall not be moved" (ver. 7). He who is Most High in every sense, engages all His infinite perfections to maintain the throne of grace upon which our King in Zion reigns. He was not moved from His purpose, nor in His sufferings, nor by His enemies, nor shall He be moved from the completion of His designs. It is an encouraging evidence of the Divine mercy that the throne of the Great Redeemer still exists among men. If human malice and Satanic rage had not been restrained by the Divine mercy, that throne would have been overthrown long ago.

2. *The assurance of this permanency is strengthened by Messiah's confidence in God*. "For the king trusteth in the Lord" (ver. 7). He did not depend on worldly armies or human skill and stratagem; but wholly in Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts. "A holy confidence in God is the true mother of victories." The joy and confidence of Christ our King, is the ground of all our joy and confidence, and the pledge of final conquest over all our foes.

CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF BLESSING TO THE RACE.

(Verse 6.)

I. Is exalted to the highest dignity.

He who was despised and rejected of men, and who Himself despised and rejected the affluence and honours of the world, was lifted up on high and clothed with majesty and glory. The cross was exchanged for a throne, the cast-off garment for a robe of peerless lustre, comparative obscurity for undying fame, suffering for felicity, the ribaldry of the mob for angelical applause. The most forbidding and unlikely appearances may disguise great resources. The dry, knotty, leafless, sapless vine seems past all recovery; but ere long it flourishes in verdant beauty, and bends under the weight of abundant fruitfulness. Christ was as a root out of a dry ground—lowly and unattractive in the beginning of His earthly life; and it seemed very improbable that anything great could ever come out of such humble and miserable surroundings. But He is now exalted to the highest dignity, and has become the benefactor to the race: before His glory all earthly splendour fades, and on His bounty the life of all depends.

II. Is endowed with all power.

Whatever can minister to the happiness and prestige of His people, Christ has unlimited ability to bestow. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." All the forces of the universe are under His control. All created intelligences are obedient to His will. He can transmute the instruments of evil into agencies of good. He can cripple and destroy the most formidable opposition. He can deliver in the latest emergency; and turn despair into victory. The soul that relies on Him can never be confounded.

III. Is inexhaustible in supply.

"Thou hast made Him most blessed for ever." At all times, in all circumstances, His aid is suitable and sufficient. The river that has flowed for ages and borne afar its treasured argosies, is not more certain in the perpetual supply of its liquid current, than is the vast stream of the Divine beneficence that flows perennially from the heavenly hills, burdened with the wealth of blessing to every needy soul. The fruit of the vintage may fail and the gathering time may not come, the earth may be shut up in hopeless barrenness, all human resources may be cut off, but the fountain of Divine blessing is never sealed, and its supplies continually abound. "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

IV. Rejoices to communicate. It was the saying of a certain generous Spanish captain, "There is no way of enjoying one's property like giving it away." It is a joy, a luxury to give. The generosity of God knows no stint. When a certain English monarch once threw open his park and gardens to the public, the royal gardener, finding it troublesome, complained to his Majesty that the visitors plucked the flowers. "What," said the kind-hearted king, "are my people fond of flowers? Then plant some more!" So our heavenly King, with lavish hand, scatters on our daily pathway the flowers of blessing, and, as fast as we can gather them, spite of the grudging, churlish world, more are supplied. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The greater our need, and the more urgent our cry for help, the greater the rapture of our Divine benefactor in supplying that need. "The Lord rejoiced over you to do you good" (Deut. xxviii. 63).

THE EXPOSURE AND PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

(Verses 8, 9.)

I. That the exposure of sin is inevitable. "Thine hand *shall* find out

all thine enemies." Iniquity delights in cunning, and is itself a masterpiece of

cunning. It may succeed in deluding its victims, and for a time escape detection. But there is One to whom every detail of the plot is fully known; and He grieves to see the toilsome ingenuity of the wicked, and smiles at its utter impotency. Sin is often its own detective. An unguarded word, a suspicious sign, an unconscious oversight, will unmask the most carefully disguised plans, and lead to exposure and misery. It is the theme of many a ballad, how the cranes aided in the discovery of the assassins of Ibycus, the poet. Recently, the house of the Caliph of the Ben Oreazen in Algeria, was entered by a band of robbers, and a box containing 25,000 francs stolen. In their haste to escape, the thieves left behind them an Arab cake bearing a particular mark, which one of the bakers of the town recognised as the sign used by Ben Xerafas, it being the custom for each family in sending their bread to the oven to mark it so as to distinguish the loaves. The police acted on the information, and, descending on a certain hut, caught the robbers asleep, with a portion of the plunder still in their possession. A simple Arab cake was the insignificant agent of discovery and exposure! If the sinner does not betray himself, the hand of God, which has power to tear away every covering, will sooner or later find him out.

II. That the exposure of sin will extend to the inmost feelings of the heart. "Thy right hand shall find out those that hate Thee." That sin is not always the worst which is most apparent. The bland, submissive countenance may cover the most vile and malignant feelings of the heart. The secret haters of God only want the opportunity and the power; and they would outrival the most notoriously wicked. The wilful and obstinate sinner would, if it were possible, bury Christ again within the rock of his hardened heart, and seal the stone that He might never rise. An electric log has recently been constructed, which thrown overboard will register the speed of the vessel through the water. By a simple contrivance,

the captain, while sitting in his cabin, can detect the dial movements of the log in the depths of the sea, and ascertain his rate of sailing every quarter of an hour. If it were possible, by any method, to watch the operations of a sinful heart, what a depth and rush of wickedness would be discovered there! And yet the day is coming when the strong hand of God shall turn aside all disguise and reveal iniquity in all its loathsomeness and deformity. He "shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

III. That the punishment of sin will be terrible and complete.

1. It will be *terrible*. "Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of Thine anger"—*Thy angry look*. Since the king is in the presence of Jehovah (ver. 6), when He directs His face upon His enemies, it exerts that destructive power which is usually ascribed to the angry look of Jehovah. "However coldly God now seems to look upon the enemies of Christ, the more will His anger burn against them in the future. God has His limited time as well for His wrath as for His grace."—*Lange*. The sins of the impenitent wicked will supply fuel to the fire of their sufferings, and perhaps be used as the means of punishing others—one class of sinners tormenting another class. "Who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?" (Nahum i. 6).

2. It will be *complete*. "The Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them." The certainty of punishment for wrong-doing is evident, not only from the declarations of Scripture, but also from the history of mankind. Nations are an example—the Antediluvians, the Sodomites, the Jews. Individuals are an example—Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Saul, and Judas. The hearts that will not glow with holy gratitude and praise shall burn with shame and infinite remorse, and the awful sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," shall be but the echo of their own self-abhorring consciences.

THE UTTER OVERTHROW OF THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST.

(Verses 8-13.)

As God had already granted victory and gone so far beyond the expectations and hopes of those who had gone forth to battle, the idea evidently suggested by these verses is, that there will be ultimately a complete victory over all the foes of Messiah and of His people.

Note :

I. That the enemies of Christ are full of malignity.

1. *They are skilful in plotting mischief.* "For they intended evil against Thee; they imagined a mischievous device" (ver. 11). They *extended*, or *stretched out evil*—an idea derived from stretching out or laying snares for the purpose of entrapping wild beasts or birds. The brain of the evil-doer is continually racked, either in devising new plans of mischief, or in counteracting the plans of others that threaten to interfere with his own. It is hard work to be wicked; it involves anxious thought, incessant activity, and sleepless vigilance. The fair goddess who lured to the first transgression and threw around it an irresistible charm, is now transformed to a demon, and tyrannises over its victim, forcing him to do as a necessity what he began to do as a pleasure. All wrong-doing begins in the intention: there the most malignant venom is secreted.

2. *They are impotent in carrying out their wicked designs.* "Which they are not able to perform" (ver. 11). The power of evil is limited, else virtue would soon cease to exist, and the throne of righteousness be overturned. But sinners are not permitted to do all that is in their power; much less are they able to accomplish all they *intend*. There is all the virulence of malice aforethought, all the barefaced evidence of guilty intention; but there is the lack of that which can alone give efficiency and success to their villany—the lack of power. *They are not able to perform.* "The serpent may hiss, but his head is broken; the lion may

worry, but he cannot devour; the tempest may thunder, but cannot strike."

II. That the enemies of Christ will be certainly detected and exposed. "Thine hand shall find out all Thine enemies: Thy right hand shall find out those that hate Thee" (ver. 8). Not only are the eyes of the Lord upon the wicked, but His hand is in search of them; and as sure as His eyes see, so certainly will His hand grasp all the workers of iniquity. None can hide from His gaze; none can escape from the terrible grip of His right hand. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God—the offended and avenging God! Rocks and mountains will be no better shelter at last, than fig-leaves were at first. The finding out, says Spurgeon, relates not only to the discovery of the hiding-places of the haters of God, but to the touching of them in their tenderest part, so as to cause the severest suffering. When He appears to judge the world hard hearts will be subdued into terror and proud spirits humbled into shame. He who has the key of human nature can touch all its springs at His will, and find out the means of bringing the utmost confusion and terror upon those who aforetime boastfully expressed their hatred of Him.

III. That the enemies of Christ will be stricken with dismay. "Therefore shalt Thou make them turn their back when Thou shalt make ready Thine arrows upon Thy strings against the face of them" (ver. 12). "Thou shalt cause them to turn their backs and fly as if a volley of arrows had been discharged in their faces. God can in a moment strike the most powerful and numerous army, even in the moment of victory, with panic; and then even the lame, the army which they had nearly routed, shall take the prey and divide the spoil." —A. Clarke. The idea is that the Almighty has set up His enemies as a butt.

(Comp. Job. vii. 20, xvi. 12; Lam. iii. 12, 13). "The judgments of God are called His arrows, being sharp, swift, sure, and deadly. What a dreadful situation, to be set as a mark and butt at which these arrows are directed! View Jerusalem encompassed by the Roman armies without, and torn to pieces by the animosity of desperate and bloody factions within! No further commentary is requisite upon this verse." *G. Horne.*

IV. That the enemies of Christ will be utterly overthrown.

1. *Their overthrow will entail severe suffering.* "Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of Thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (ver. 9). The wicked shall be consumed with the fire of Divine wrath, like wood put into a furnace. The wrath of God is often represented under the image of fire. (See Deut. iv. 24, xxxii. 22; Ps. xviii. 8; Matt. xiii. 42, xviii. 8, xxv. 41; Mark ix. 44; 2 Thess. i. 8.) The enemies of Christ shall not only be cast into the furnace of fire; but the Lord shall make them themselves as a fiery oven: they will be their own tormentors. "Our pleasant vices are made the whips to scourge us." It is said that a frown of Queen Elizabeth killed Sir Christopher Hatton, the Lord Chancellor of England. Who then can stand before the frown and fierce anger of the insulted Majesty of Heaven?

2. *The overthrow will be complete.* "Their fruit shalt Thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men" (ver. 10). That which they prize the most, and which has cost a life of toil and anxiety to acquire, will perish. The ambitious dream, the hoarded treasure, the coveted honour, shall vanish as a fractured bubble. Even their posterity—the children who have imbibed their acrimony and trod in their footsteps—shall pass away, so that the race shall come to an end, and their memory be forgotten.

The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance; but the name of the wicked shall rot. The possessions of the haters of Christ are a heritage of woe.

V. That the overthrow of the enemies of Christ will illustrate the supreme power of Jehovah.

1. *The supreme power of Jehovah is self-sustained.* "Be Thou exalted Lord, in Thine own strength" (ver. 13). *Exalt Thyself, O Lord*—Thy creatures cannot exalt Thee. Lift Thyself up and discomfit Thy foes by Thine own strength! God's right hand has often given the victory to His followers, though they struck not one blow in their own defence. How little can the strength of man avail when the Lord raiseth up Himself to the battle. The end of all conflict with evil will be the eternal, unchallengeable exaltation of Jehovah. While He watches over and ensures the best interests of His people, He preserves inviolate His own honour and majesty.

2. *The supremacy of Jehovah should be joyfully celebrated.* "So will we sing and praise Thy power" (ver. 13). "God is to receive praise in reference to that attribute which He has exhibited most in the defence or salvation of His followers. One feels himself lost, condemned, on the brink of hell; he calls for *mercy*, is heard and saved: *mercy* therefore will be the chief subject of his praise, and the burden of his song. Another feels himself beset with powerful adversaries, with the weakest of whom he is not able to cope; he cries to the Almighty for strength; he is heard and strengthened with strength in his soul. He therefore will naturally magnify the all-conquering power of the Lord."—*A. Clarke.* Joy should always flow in the channel of praise. The leading thought in the whole psalm is, that God will ultimately triumph over all His enemies, and that this triumph will be followed by universal rejoicing and praise. Haste, O haste, the happy era!

PSALM XXII.

INTRODUCTION.

"The subject of this psalm is the deliverance of a righteous sufferer from his enemies, and the effect of this deliverance on others. It is so framed as to be applied without violence to any case belonging to the class described, yet so that it was fully verified only in Christ, the Head and Representative of the class in question. The immediate speaker in the psalm is an ideal person, the righteous servant of Jehovah, but his words may, to a certain extent, be appropriated by any suffering believer and by the whole suffering Church, as they have been in all ages."—*Alexander*.

FORSAKEN.

(Verses 1, 2.)

I. Forsaken and Suffering. "Why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me and from the words of my roaring?" Suffering is one of the mysteries of our complicated human life. None are exempt. The voice of anguish rises towards heaven in a ceaseless wail. As there are ecstasies of joy when the soul is exalted into a state of inexpressible rapture, so there are corresponding depressions when the soul is plunged into a gulf of darkness and despair. The bitterest element in all suffering is the sense of *desertion*, when the lonely victim is drifting helplessly before the black, pelting storm, without a hand to help, a voice to cheer, or a light to guide! Who can fathom the feelings of the solitary sufferer of Golgotha indicated in that thrilling and mysterious cry—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" It was "not the *why* of impatience or despair, not the sinful questioning of one whose heart rebels against his chastening, but rather the cry of a lost child who cannot understand why his father has left him, and who longs to see his father's face again. What these words were in the lips of the Holy One of God, heart of man may not conceive. For a moment in that last agony the Perfect Man was *alone* with the sin of the world."—*Perowne*.

II. Forsaken but not prayerless. "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not, and in the night season and am not silent" (ver. 2). "It is as if he said, I cannot understand this darkness. It is not that I have for-

gotten Thee. Day and night I cry, to me there is no silence."—*Perowne*. Prayer is the great resource of the troubled soul; and though deliverance does not come immediately, prayer is not abandoned. The more continuous the misery the more intense and vocal the prayer. Though the door refuse to open for weeks and months, the earnest suppliant knows he is before the right door, that there is no other to which he can go, and that ere long it must open. "The greatest pain to the troubled soul is not to be sure of the hearing of his prayers. Whoever does not give up God, even when his trouble of body and pain of soul has advanced to the highest point, soon has the experience that God has not forsaken him."—*Lange*. The solitude is not so oppressive whose silence is broken by the voice of prayer. Delay increases the soul's importunity, and importunity will succeed (Luke xi. 8).

III. Forsaken but trusting. Dense as may be the darkness and acute as may be the anguish, the sufferer does not lose his hold on God. It is still, "*My God, my God.*" The great test and triumph of faith is witnessed in the continuance of confidence, not only in one who is absent, but in one whom we are conscious has deserted us.

1. *This trust was encouraged by contemplating the holiness of the Divine character.* "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (ver. 3). Throned above the myriad praises of the congregation which thankfully celebrate the many acts of Divine deliverance and redemption. The holi-

ness of God is but another aspect of His faithfulness and mercy. The more vivid and extensive our conception of sin, the more exalted and impressive will be our view of the Divine holiness. The Redeemer of the world drew His mightiest consolation from a recollection of the holiness of God, when, in His hour of darkness and sorrow, He was brought into close and lonely contact with the enormity of human sin. "While the holiness of God is in the highest degree acknowledged and adored, the afflicted speaker in this verse seems to marvel how the holy God could forsake him, and be silent to his cries. The argument is, Thou art holy, oh! why is it Thou dost disregard Thy holy One in His hour of sharpest anguish? We may not question the holiness of God, but we may argue from it, and use it as a plea in our petitions."—*Spurgeon*. "The expression, 'Thou art holy,' is a corroding element which must by and

by entirely consume the other, 'Thou hast forsaken me.'—*Hengstenberg*.

2. *This trust was encouraged by recollecting the experience of God's people in times of trouble.* "Our fathers trusted in Thee," &c. (ver. 4, 5). Thrice "they trusted," and only once "they cried." It was not that God could not deliver those who trusted in Him: He had done it for those of old time. He who could deliver the sinful when they cried to Him in faith, could much more deliver the Sinless One who came to Him in innocence. A genuine trust is always succeeded by a signal deliverance. Man is often disappointed and confounded when trusting to human policy and power; but never when trusting in God.

LESSONS:—1. *The lowest level of suffering is reached when the soul is consciously forsaken of God.* 2. *Prayer is the most suitable exercise of the soul in the most trying moments.* 3. *When the soul can do nothing else it can trust in God.*

THE LONELINESS OF SUFFERING.

(Verses 6-18.)

I. Oppresses the soul with a sense of personal unworthiness (ver. 6-8).

1. *This unworthiness is humbly acknowledged.* "I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people" (ver. 6). The first step in a downward career is to sink in the estimation of others; the next and more fatal one is to sink in our own estimation. Pungent and continued suffering depresses the mind, and fills it with gloomy and but half-comprehended thoughts, and the sufferer is tempted to depreciate himself and all his doings. "Man is compared to a worm in Job xxv. 6 on account of the nothingness of his existence. The worm in the passage before us, as in Isa. xli. 13, serves to designate nothingness within nothingness. The reproach and the contempt are brought under our notice, not so much in themselves, as in reference to the ground on which they rest—the deep misery of the sufferer, whose condition is such that it is reckoned by all men as altogether desperate."—*Hengstenberg*.

2. *This sense of unworthiness renders the soul more keenly sensitive to insult and scorn.* "All they that see me laugh me to scorn," &c. (ver. 7, 8). It is painful to endure the scornful ridicule of our enemies when we are in health and vigour, and able to repel and answer it. But when all our powers are prostrate by affliction, and we are too helpless to reply, the torture is overwhelming. Still more cruel and unbearable is it when the sufferer's God is maligned (ver. 8). "This is the most lacerating kind of contempt. Because he loves God more than himself, he would rather encounter floods of derision *himself*, than that one drop should fall on the name of his God. The shaking of the head and the opened mouth denote mocking delight."—*Tholuck*. Oh! how inexpressibly keen must have been the sufferings of the Sinless One as He listened to the revilings of those who gloated over His crucifixion! How often is it that man despises what God holds in highest esteem! If we would be true followers

of Christ we must be content to bear His reproach.

II. Throws the mind back upon the thought of the Divine Care from the earliest period of life (ver. 9, 10). He who protected and sustained us in the helplessness and perils of infancy, will not leave us to perish in the darkest and loneliest extremity. Too little do we think of the goodness of God which brought us into being, provided for every want, brightened the happy period of youth, and led us to trust Him in every emergency of life. Comfort may be found in the hour of trial by reflecting on the past mercies of God. The more conscious we become of our own impotency, the more tenaciously do we cling to the Divine arm and the more highly do we prize the smallest acts of kindness and sympathy. "I began to rail against Providence," wrote the imprisoned Armand Charratt with the blood he had pricked from his arm, "when a messenger of mercy came to me in the form of an escaped canary-bird down a chimney of the Bastille. I kept the canary-bird, and for three years I was no longer solitary." "God begins His care over us from the earliest hour. We are dandled upon the knee of mercy and cherished in the lap of goodness; our cradle is canopied by Divine love, and our first totterings are guided by His care. He who was our God when we left our mother, will be with us till we return to mother-earth, and will keep us from perishing in the belly of hell. Faith finds weapons everywhere."—*Spurgeon*.

III. Is embittered by the violence and cruelty of relentless enemies.

1. *They are violent.* "Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (ver. 12, 13). The lonely sufferer is terrified by the fierce opposition of his enemies, who, like strong and ravenous beasts, threaten him with horrible mutilation and destruction. The wild, ferocious outbreaks of the wicked are ever a source of distress to the holy soul. One of the bitterest elements in the sufferings of the

world's Redeemer was, that He had to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself. The sorrows of the good are met with the taunting, malicious revelry of the wicked.

2. *They are cruel.* "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet" (ver. 16). The enemies are still compared to savage animals, but the figure is somewhat different: "dogs" not only as fierce, but as unclean. We must remember that these dogs are the savage wild dogs of the East (1 Kings xiv. 11; Ps. lix. 6, 14, 15).—*Perowne*. Jews and heathens enclosed the solitary Sufferer of Calvary, as dogs in their madness and fury close in upon the hunted stag. They pierced His hands with nails, that our souls might not be pierced with judgments. Sin is the most terrific instrument of cruelty.

IV. Intensifies the sense of utter helplessness and agony (vers. 11, 14, 15, 17, 18). It is impossible to find words that will depict more graphically a condition of complete exhaustion, distress, and despair, than those contained in these verses. The lonely sufferer, after referring to the cruelty of his tormentors, passes on to speak of the effects of their savage treatment upon himself. He felt absolutely friendless and alone:—"There is none to help." As poured-out water dissolves on the ground, so his strength is dissolved: he is utterly spent. "I am poured out like water." His bones, the support of the physical frame, are sundered and displaced, involving unutterable agony. "All my bones are out of joint. I may tell all my bones, they look and stare upon me." His courage fails him; the brave heart can hold up no longer, but sinks in despair. "My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." The sap of life is dried up like the moisture out of a burnt-out potsherd: his misery and fevered pain exhausted his endurance and strength, as a vessel of clay is dried and burnt within a furnace. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd." In consequence of excessive thirst and anguish,

his tongue is sealed to his jaws ; and he feels as one who has already entered the grave. "My tongue cleaveth to my jaws, and Thou hast brought me into the dust of death." As a last act of indignity, as though he were already dead, his very clothes are stripped from him and ruffled as plunder among his un pitying enemies. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (ver. 18). How all these particulars were fulfilled in the

sufferings of the Son of God, is narrated in the gospels with touching simplicity and realistic power. The heaviest stroke in all suffering is that which we must bear alone. No loneliness is more oppressive, more distressing, more insupportable than the *loneliness of suffering*.

Learn :—1. *The weakness and vanity of man.* 2. *The terrible consequences of sin.* 3. *The only source of help in extremity is Divine.*

A PATHETIC CRY FOR HELP.

(Verses 19–21.)

I. That God is the unfailing source of help in time of trouble. "Be not Thou far from me, O Lord : O my strength, haste Thee to help me" (ver. 19). Trouble is a blessing when it drives us nearer to God. The fainting victim turns away from his fierce persecutors and from his own sufferings, and fixes his eyes on God. All earthly help has its limits, but Divine help never fails. If God be distant, the darkness deepens and the sorrow too. But when the strength of Israel hastens to the rescue, the light of hope breaks in and the anguish is assuaged. From the lowest depths God hears the piteous cry of the helpless. "Prayer is the weapon with which the bars of the gates of heaven are burst open."

II. That deliverance is implored from imminent peril (ver. 20, 21).

1. *From threatened death.* "Deliver my soul from the sword : *my darling*"—my only one. "From the parallelism = *my soul, my life*. The *life* is so called, either because man has but *one* life, or because it is the most precious of all things."—*Perowne*. This life was exposed to destruction by the sword ; for "the sword is an individualising designation of whatever is an instrument of death." The Lord can blunt the point of the sharpest weapon ; and, at the last moment, restore the stricken one who cries to Him.

2. *From the ferocity of the most pitiless tormentors.* "Save me—from the power of the dog—from the lion's mouth

—from the horns of the unicorns." *Luther* observes—"The rage of the furious devil is so great, that the prophet does not consider it enough to have represented it by a sharp sword, but introduces further, for the same purpose, the tearings of raging, furious dogs, the mouth of the greedy and hungry lion, which stands already open, and is ready to devour, and the dreadfully fierce wrath of the raging, terrible unicorn." The word unicorn is from a Hebrew verb which signifies *to elevate*, and refers to an animal "having a high horn in its nose or front, an untameable beast, which may be slain, but cannot be taken alive. It is spoken of in Scripture in respect to its *strength* in Num. xxii., its untameable *ferocity* Job. xxxix. 9, its *height of horn* Ps. xcii. 11."—*Bythner*. The fury of the most violent and dreaded enemy is under the control of the sufferer's God. He who holds the winds in His fists, whose whisper stills the angriest storm, whose look smites the most formidable hosts with paralysis, can dissipate, like foam before the breeze, the violent anger of our persecuting adversaries.

III. That the cry for help is emboldened by the recollection of past deliverances. "For Thou hast heard me" (ver. 21). None are so poor in blessings, but there are some periods in their past history in which they were specially impressed with the saving interposition of heaven, in answer to prayer. The soul in its deepest distress falls back upon such a well-tested ex-

perience, and gathers confidence. From this point we observe a marked change in the condition of the sufferer. From a state of abject wretchedness and despair, he rises into the apparently sudden enjoyment of a radiant hope,

and calm, restful assurance. Faith, however feeble its grasp, if persevering, is certain to triumph. The past is an inspiration for the present, and a guide for the future.

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE.

(Verses 22-31.)

At this point we detect a marked change in the tone and spirit of the psalm. Light breaks in upon the forlorn sufferer. Despair gives place to hope; and the prospect of speedy and certain deliverance animates the soul with gratitude and joy.

Observe:

I. That this deliverance was celebrated by grateful praise.

1. The *theme* of praise is the Name of the Great Deliverer. "I will declare **THY NAME** unto my brethren." The Name of Jehovah is inclusive of all the Divine perfections; but that perfection which is more immediately exercised in effecting for us a great deliverance will naturally be most prominent in our song. The deliverance of the world's Redeemer from His unutterable sufferings, and the consequent deliverance of humanity from the power of sin, called into play all the energies and perfections of the Divine Nature. The Divine Name, therefore, in all its depth and expanse of meaning, is the subject of highest adoration. To declare the name of the Lord is to make known what He has done.

2. The praise is offered *publicly*. "Unto my brethren—in the midst of the congregation—in the great congregation—before them that fear Him" (vers. 22, 25). Instead of the anxious cry, which, in contrast with the praises of Israel, previously sounded from the mouth of the innocent and horribly tortured victim, the song of praise of the delivered, is in future to resound in the *assembly of his brothers*, and the whole congregation is to hear, to their own edification, the declaration of the great and wonderful things that God has done to this one who was so afflicted

and utterly lost. The sufferings of the righteous are according to the Divine purpose not only to be of advantage to the present *congregation* but likewise to the *heathen* throughout the entire world.—*Lange*.

3. The praise is *general*. "All ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him" (ver. 23). All the true worshippers of Jehovah are called upon to praise Him. True praise is characterised by profound *reverence*. "Ye that fear the Lord." "Humble awe of God is so necessary a preparation for praising Him that none are fit to sing to His honour but such as reverence His word. Holy fear should always keep the key of the singing pew. Where Jesus leads the tune none but holy lips may dare to sing."—*Spurgeon*. True praise is accompanied with substantial *thank-offerings*, "I will pay my vows before them that fear Him" (ver. 25). The faithful promiser, who, when in trouble had vowed to offer certain sacrifices, was accustomed, after deliverance, to invite the widow, the orphan, and the poor to participate with him in the sacrificial meal (Deut. xii. 18, xvi. 11). The grateful heart will praise God with a full-handed generosity, and delights to share its bounty and joy with others. The salvation of one adds to the happiness of many (Luke xv. 10).

4. The praise *recognises the special character of the deliverance* (ver. 24). God esteems what others despise. The abject sufferer who sinks below the notice and help of man is never beyond the reach and sympathy of God. The recollection of the horrors from which we have been snatched, will give a colouring to the expression of our gratitude. *The affliction of the afflicted*,

"The same word is used with Messianic reference Isa. liii. 4, 7; Zech. ix. 9. *When he cried He heard.* What a contrast to vers. 1, 2! Very remarkable is this confident acknowledgment of God's goodness in hearing prayer."—*Perowne.*

5. The praise will bring satisfaction to the most needy. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied," &c. (ver. 26). The gratitude of the delivered sufferer and the joy it occasions to others, are represented under the figure of a feast in which the poorest participate. The grateful and extended proclamation of the merciful works of God, especially as exhibited in the salvation of the human race, will supply the spiritual banquet for which millions crave, and for lack of which they perish.

II. That this deliverance will be the means of conferring blessing on all mankind.

1. *All nations will acknowledge the supremacy of Jehovah.* "All the ends of the world shall remember," &c. (vers. 27, 28). The *heathen* may have forgotten God, but they are not forgotten by Him: they may have *ignored* the Divine rule, but they cannot destroy it—"He is the governor among the nations." The heathen who share in the great salvation wrought out by the suffering Messiah will gladly submit to His lordship. "It is well to mark the order of conversion as here set forth:—They shall *remember*—this is reflection, like the prodigal who came unto himself: and *turn unto Jehovah*—this is repentance, like Manasseh who left his idols; and shall *worship*—this is holy service as Paul adored the Christ whom once he abhorred."—*Spurgeon.*

2. *All ranks of men shall find happiness in the worship of Jehovah* (ver. 29). Here the image of the banquet is resumed, the feast is provided for all, irrespective of national or personal distinctions. "All they that be fat upon the earth"—the rich and mighty; "all they that go down to the dust"—those who are so miserably starved and poor that they are ready to perish, and "cannot keep alive their own soul"—

all shall sit down together at the same divinely-furnished banquet. Here all guests are poor, and God is rich for all. The Gospel shall win the homage of all nations and all classes of men.

III. That this deliverance will vindicate the Divine Righteousness to future ages (vers. 30, 31). "His Righteousness not only as manifested in the deliverance of His righteous servant, but as manifested in all His great work of salvation, both in the suffering and in the exaltation of Christ, and also in providing the feast for all who will partake thereof. This hope of the conversion of other nations to the faith of God's elect, was in an especial manner characteristic of the period of the return from the Babylonish captivity. The prophecies of Zechariah are full of it, and so are many of the Psalms which probably date from that period."—*Perowne.* The divine conduct in the great work of Redemption will be continually celebrated. Posterity will perpetuate the worship of Jehovah; each succeeding generation will preserve and disseminate the knowledge committed to it by the generation preceding. The seed of the righteous is indestructible and ever fruitful. The true Church of God can never perish. It is said that the Baobab-tree—the largest known tree in the world—though stripped of its bark outside and hollowed to a large cavity within its trunk, has the singular power of exuding from its substance a perfectly new bark, which lines both the inner and outer surfaces of the tree. So is it with the Church of God. Though pierced and peeled and wounded by the gleaming axes of malicious enemies, it still lives and grows in irresistible productiveness, affording shelter to millions, and stretching its life-giving and healing foliage over all nations.

LESSONS :

1. *Deliverance from peril should be gratefully acknowledged.*

2. *The world is most indebted to those who have suffered most for its benefit.*

3. *The influence of a good work never dies.*

PSALM XXIII.

INTRODUCTION.

"The king who had been the shepherd-boy, and had been taken from the quiet sheep-cotes to rule over Israel, sings this little psalm of Him who is the true Shepherd and King of men. We do not know at what period of David's life it was written, but it sounds as if it were the work of his later years. There is a fullness of experience about it, and a tone of subdued, quiet confidence which speaks of a heart mellowed by years, and of a faith made sober by many a trial. A young man would not write so calmly, and a life which was just opening would not afford material for such a record of God's guardianship in all changing circumstances. If we think of the psalm as the work of David's later years, is it not very beautiful to see the old king looking back with such vivid and loving remembrance to his childhood's occupation, and bringing up again to memory in his palace the green valleys, the gentle streams, the dark glens where he had led his flocks in the old days; very beautiful to see him traversing all the stormy years of warfare and rebellion, of crime and sorrow, which lay between, and finding in all God's guardian presence and gracious guidance? There is nothing difficult of understanding in the psalm. The train of thought is clear and obvious. The experiences which it details are common, the emotions it expresses simple and familiar. The fears that have been dried, the fears that have been dissipated, by this old song; the love and thankfulness which have found in them their best expression, prove the worth of its simple words. It lives in most of our memories. The psalm falls into two halves, in both of which the same general thought of God's guardian care is presented, though under different illustrations, and with some variety of detail. The first half sets Him forth as a Shepherd, and us as the sheep of His pasture; the second gives Him as the Host, and us as the guests at His table and the dwellers in His house."—*A. Maclaren.*

THE DIVINE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.

(Verses 1-4.)

I. The Divine Shepherd supplies every want. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (ver. 1). The shepherd is, literally, one who feeds. It is an image that would be specially suggestive to a nation of shepherds. [Most beautifully does it symbolise the character of Jehovah as the provider, protector, guide, and unfailing companion of His people.] To appreciate the force of the image, it is necessary to understand the difference between the modern shepherd and the Oriental shepherd of olden times. "Beneath the burning skies and the clear starry night of Palestine," says Robertson, "there grows up between the shepherd and his flock a union of attachment and tenderness. It is the country where, at any moment, sheep are liable to be swept away by some mountain torrent, or carried off by hill-robbers, or torn by wolves. At any moment their protector may have to save them by personal hazard. Alone in those vast solitudes, with no human being near, the shepherd and the sheep feel a life in common. Differences disappear, the vast

interval between the man and the brute: the single point of union is felt strongly. One is the love of the protector, the other the love of the grateful life; and so between lives so distant, there is woven by night and day, by summer suns and winter frosts, a living network of sympathy." Between the Good Shepherd and His people there exist the tenderest relations—on the one side of unfathomable affection, on the other of calm unlimited confidence. "*I shall not want*"—I want nothing. With Jehovah for my shepherd and guardian, whose hand rests on all the sources of supply, I can lack no temporal or spiritual good. When the holy John Fletcher, of Madeley, was asked by George III. if he would accept preferment in the Church as an acknowledgment for an able and timely paper he had written on American affairs, he returned the respectful but characteristic reply—"Sire, I want nothing, but more grace."

II. The Divine Shepherd affords tranquillising rest to the weary. "He maketh me to lie down in green pas-

tures, and leadeth me beside the still waters," or, *waters of rest* (ver. 2). "It is the hot noon-tide, and the desert lies baking in the awful glare, and every stone on the hills of Judea burns the foot that touches it. But in that panting breathless hour, here is a little green glen, with a quiet brooklet, and a moist lush herbage all along its course, and great stones that fling a black shadow over the dewy grass at their base; and there would the shepherd lead his flock, while the 'sunbeams, like swords,' are piercing everything beyond that hidden covert. Sweet silence broods there. The sheep feed and drink, and couch in cool lairs till he calls them forth again. So God leads His children."—*Maclaren*. With all the haste and worry and toil of life, there is much of quiet, pleasant restfulness. Seasons of repose are necessary to recover and fit the jaded worker for the ever-pressing and imperative duties of active life. The soul must rest peacefully in God's favour and in placid, hallowed communion with Him, in order to satisfy its keenest hunger and slake its fiercest thirst.

III. The Divine Shepherd prepares the soul for the loftiest service. "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (ver. 3.) The designed result of rest and refreshment is the accession of new vigour to both mind and body. The weeks spent in purposeless loitering on the shining sands of the summer sea, or in rambling among the huge, silent hills, or on the banks of the brawling trout stream, with its tree-shaded nooks, its rustling sedges and glittering weirs, tend to refresh and invigorate the whole man, and prepare for the stern, tugging warfare of life and for nobler enterprise. So is it in the spiritual life. *He restoreth my soul.* "When the soul grows sorrowful, He revives it: when it is sinful, He sanctifies it: when it is weak, He strengthens it:" when it wanders, He brings it back. God blesses not simply to impart happiness; but to fit the soul for holier service and more extensive usefulness. *He leadeth me in the paths of*

righteousness. "Life is not a fold for the sheep to lie down in, but a road for them to walk on. We get blessings, not to let them pass away like waste steam puffed into empty air, but that we may use them to drive the wheels of life. The waters of happiness are not for a luxurious bath where a man may lie, till, like flax steeped too long, the very fibre be rotted out of him; a quick plunge will brace him, and he will come out refreshed for work. Rest is to fit for work, work is to sweeten rest. There is nothing more evanescent in its nature than a mere emotion, even though it be that of joy in God, unless it be turned into a spring of action for God. Such emotions, like photographs, vanish from the heart unless they be fixed. Work for God is the way to fix them."—*Maclaren*.

IV. The Divine Shepherd provides protection and consolation in the darkest peril. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (ver. 4). The soul fears not to enter the "sunless gulfs" of sorrow when assured of the supporting presence and protecting care of the Good Shepherd. [The darkness of death is but a *shadow* after all. The trusting soul enters the gloomy gorge only to emerge into the brighter day of immortality.] "Some evils may come; some will probably come,—one at least is sure to come. However bright may be the path, somewhere on it, perhaps just round that turning, 'sits the shadow feared of man.' [But to the Christian heart there is the conviction that the hand which guides us into the dark valley, will guide us through it and up out of it.] Yes, strange as it may sound, the presence of Him who sends the sorrow is the best help to bear it. The assurance that the hand which strikes is the hand which binds up, makes the stroke a blessing,—sucks the poison out of the wound of sorrow, and turns the rod which smites into the staff to lean on." When Dr. Guthrie, the celebrated and eloquent Divine, felt himself treading the deep, dark valley, he exclaimed,

"Death is mining away here, slowly but surely, in the dark. Blessed Jesus! what would I do now but for Thee!"

LESSONS: 1. *The sheep of Jehovah are saved from poverty.* 2. *From wandering.* 3. *From uselessness.* 4. *From fear.* 5. *From sorrow.*

A ROYAL BANQUET.

(Verses 5, 6.)

The image is changed, but we have substantially the same ideas as those given in the earlier portion of the psalm. There are, as before, the food, the guardianship, the peril, the journey. Jehovah is here regarded as a Bountiful Host and His people as guests at His banqueting table. The verses illustrate certain striking features in the *Royal Banquet*.

I. This banquet is provided in the midst of conflict. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (ver. 5). [Life not only involves work, but also conflict. Our enemies are numerous, powerful and cruel. The fight is fierce, prolonged and exhausting.] Yet, spread by invisible hands is the table in the wilderness, in the presence of our grim-visaged enemies who, while looking on, are restrained by some irresistible spell from harming. Unlike the soldier on the battle-field, who, if he eats at all, snatches a hasty meal and, wearied and but half refreshed, hurries again to the fight, the Christian warrior pauses to rest and feast. [There is no hurry, no confusion, no fear, though the eyes of his enemies flash upon him with vindictive glare, the presence of the Divine host is an impenetrable shield about him.] So is it ever in the progress of spiritual life. There is always the conflict, always the foe; always the guardian, always the banquet.

II. This banquet is promotive of abundant joy. "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (ver. 5). The allusion is to the custom in the East of anointing with oil on festal occasions as a means of refreshment, and as indicating prosperity and rejoicing. The words also point out the lavish outflow of the Divine beneficence, and the limitation of the human capacity

which trembles with joy under the overflowing current. *My cup runneth over.* "He had not only a fulness of abundance, but of redundancy. Those that have this happiness must carry their cup upright, and see that it overflows into their poor brethren's emptier vessels."—*Trapp*. "Drink the cup of gladness as men do when their foe is at their side, looking askance over the rim, and with one hand on the sword, ready, aye ready, against treachery and surprise. But the presence of the danger should make the feast more enjoyable too, by the moderation it enforces and by the contrast it affords—as to sailors on shore or soldiers in a truce. Joy may grow on the very face of danger, as a slender rose-bush flings its bright sprays and fragrant blossoms over the lip of a cataract."—*Maclaren*.

III. This banquet will satisfy all the wants of a lifetime. "Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (ver. 6). Goodness and mercy are the staple viands of the feast, and give a flavour and virtue to all the rest. [Man needs goodness to supply all his wants, and mercy to cancel all his sins. The words are expressive of simple and unbounded confidence in God as to every event in our earthly future. "Shall follow me all the days of my life." Through all its changes, its shade and sunshine, its perils and deliverances, its sorrows and joys, to its close.] "His enemies had pursued him even to the presence of his host, henceforth grace and joy will pursue him and load him with blessings." New tokens of His pity and love shall shine upon us, before us, and behind us, on our right hand and on our left, throughout the whole of our earthly pilgrimage. The most indigent are rich indeed when encompassed with the Divine loving-

kindness. "What, all this, and Jesus, too!" said a poor cottager, as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water.

IV. This banquet is the type and pledge of the everlasting feast in the heavenly banqueting hall. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (ver. 6). Suggestive of the closest intimacy with God and the ceaseless enjoyment of His favour. I will dwell there, "where, without a veil, irradiation from the Eternal Three shall dart unutterable joys into my glorified spirit, transformed into the image of the God whom I behold; and near His throne, high and lifted up, where bright angelic hosts, His train, fill the vast temple with His glory. His love my all-sufficient portion, and my happy labour, everlasting praise." In these words, as if reluctant to dismiss the thought, the psalmist returns to the image of the Good Shepherd, who, at length, conducts His flock to a place of safety and undisturbed repose. "The sheep are led by many a way, some-

times through sweet meadows, sometimes limping along sharp-flinted, dusty highways, sometimes high up over rough, rocky mountain-passes, sometimes down through deep gorges, with no sunshine in their gloom; but they are ever being led to one place, and when the hot day is over, they are gathered into one fold, and the sinking sun sees them safe, where no wolf can come, nor any robber climb up any more, but all shall rest for ever under the shepherd's eye."

—*Maclaren*. Very quaint but expressive is the paraphrase on these two verses by an old Elizabethan poet, (Francis Davison)—

"Thou my board with messes large
Dost surcharge;
My bowles full of wine Thou pow'rest,
And before myne enemies'
Envious eies
Balme upon my head Thou show'rest.

Neither dures Thy bounteous grace
For a space;
But it knowes nor bound nor measure.
So my daies to my life's end
I shall spend
In Thy courtes with heavenly pleasure."

PSALM XXIV.

INTRODUCTION.

"This grand choral hymn was in all probability composed and sung on the occasion of the removal of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David, on Mount Zion (2 Sam. vi.). It was a day of solemn gladness and triumph. No long period had elapsed since David had wrested the stronghold of Zion from the last remnant of the hill-tribes of the Canaanites which lingered in Palestine. Henceforth this mountain-city, deemed by its ancient inhabitants impregnable, was selected by the conqueror as the seat of the royal residence and the centre of religious worship; and thither, after having subdued his enemies, he determined to bring the ark which, for nearly fifty years, had been left neglected at Kirjath-Jearim. It is difficult for us to conceive the feelings, at once of the most exalted and fervent patriotism, and of the deepest religious enthusiasm, which would be awakened in the hearts of the people by such an event. The king, and priests, and people, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands (1 Chron. xv. 2), in solemn procession, and with all the accompaniments of music and song, conducted the ark to its resting-place on the holy mountain. It was then that this majestic anthem rose to heaven, 'Jehovah's is the earth, and the fulness thereof;' and the gates of that grey old fortress were bid to lift themselves up, as being too narrow to admit the King of glory. The psalm consists of two principal divisions: I. The preparation for the entry of Jehovah into His holy mountain (ver. 1-6). II. The entry itself (ver. 2-10)."—*Perowne*.

THE DIVINE PROPRIETORSHIP OF THE WORLD.

(Verses 1, 2.)

I. The Divine proprietorship of the world is absolute and all-inclusive (ver. 1). The world belongs to God—

1. *As to its matter*. "The earth is

the Lord's." With all its forms of beauty and magnificence, with all its ponderous forces and mystic laws, with all its wealth of mineral and hidden trea-

tures of earth, air, and ocean. Man has conquered the earth by the power of the sword, and claimed the right to dispose of it in petty states and kingdoms; but the earth does not belong to man. "He is but a tenant at will,—a leaseholder upon most precarious tenure, liable to instantaneous ejection. The great Landowner and true Proprietor holds His court above the clouds, and laughs at the title-deeds of worms of the dust. The fee-simple is not with the lord of the manor, nor the freeholder; but with the Creator."—*Spurgeon*. 2. *As to its productiveness*. "And the fulness thereof." It is God who makes the soil fruitful, the air vital and sustaining, and the water in the great ocean-basin maintain its just proportion to the land. Notwithstanding that population follows so closely on the heels of production, there is always enough for man and beast. God fills the earth with plenty, and keeps it full. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," are words inscribed on the front of the Royal Exchange, London, and on similar institutions throughout the country. It is fitting that the great centres of the world's commerce should acknowledge the Divine source and ownership of the world's wealth. 3. *As to its inhabitants*. "The world, and they that dwell therein." The Jews claimed to be the sole and peculiar possession of Jehovah, and yet they were accustomed to sing words like these! They are not the only people whose sentiments and conduct have been beneath the nobler teachings of their creed. Christianity has done brave work in breaking down the exclusiveness of nations. Not one specially favoured nation, but *all* nations belong to the Lord. The rights and freedom of manhood belong to every individual member of the human family, whatever his country, colour, or surroundings. All living beings—the denizens of earth, air, and sea—are the property of Jehovah. The Supreme Owner of all deserves the obedience and homage of all. The devout mind sees all things in God, and God in all things.

II. The Divine proprietorship of the world is based on the act of creation.

"For He hath founded it upon the seas" (ver. 2). "The reference is no doubt to the account of creation in Genesis, the dry land having emerged from the water, and seeming to rest upon it. (Compare cxxxvi. 6; Prov. viii. 29). It would, however, be quite out of place to suppose that in such language we have the expression of any theory, whether popular or scientific, as to the structure of the earth's surface."—*Peronne*. The human mind has wearied itself in spinning theories about the origin of the world, and in the historic development of these theories, from time to time, different schools of pseudo-religious philosophy have prevailed—modern thought being but a reproduction, in a new setting, of the ideas of the ancient philosophers. *Deism*, representing one school of thinkers, suffers a God to exist, but plunges Him into a state of apathetic repose. *Pantheism* confounds Him with the world. *Materialism* utterly denies Him, while, all along the line of these theorists, we see the world, the spirit of the world, the life of the world, and the matter of the world, are exalted and adored in succession. Proud, vain, puny man! He is like a fly discussing the mechanism of an elephant, or a wriggling annelid discoursing on the vastness and glory of the ocean. *Augustine*, in a splendid passage of his "Confessions," describes the true origin of creation as the work of God: "I asked the earth; it said, I am not He; and all that therein is made the same acknowledgment. I asked the sea and the depths, and all that move and live therein, and they answered, We are not thy God; seek higher. I asked the winds, but the air with all its inhabitants answered, I am not thy God. I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and they answered, Neither are we the God whom thou seekest. And I said to all things that surrounded me, Ye have told me concerning my God, that ye are not He; speak then to me of Him. And they all cried with loud voices, He made us!"

III. The Divine proprietorship of the world is confirmed by the fact of its preservation. "And established it upon the floods," or, *upon the streams*

doth He make it fast. The preservation of the world is a perpetual miracle. It requires the exercise of the same power of God as that which first called it into being. The area of the sea is three times greater than that of the land. But for the preserving care of God, the waters of the ocean would inundate and submerge the earth, and destroy all its inhabitants. As much water is contributed to the ocean by the rivers as would make a new ocean every year, and yet the sea is not augmented. The preserving power of God has put into operation the law of evaporation, by

which the sea loses every day as much moisture as it receives from tributary streams. How insecure are the foundations of the earth—resting on treacherous and unstable water! If God were to withdraw His hand for a moment, the elemental forces of nature would annihilate the world and they that dwell therein. He who preserves the world has an undisputed right to possess it.

LEARN: 1. *The folly of loving the present world.* 2. *The audacity of Satan in claiming all the kingdoms of the world.* 3. *The duty and privilege of rendering joyful worship to the great Proprietor of all.*

THE MORAL FITNESS OF THE TRUE WORSHIPPER.

(Verses 3-6.)

I. That it is the privilege of the true worshipper to approach near to God (ver. 3). He “ascends into the hill of the Lord,” and “stands in His holy place.” His *holy place* is no less than the very place and seat of glory. And being such, you cannot imagine it but hard to come by; the very petty glories of the world are so. This is a *hill* of glory, hard to climb, difficult to ascend, craggy to pass up, steep to clamber, no plain *campagna* to it; the broad easy way leads some whither else (Matt. vii. 13); the way to this is narrow,—it is rough and troublesome. But not only to ascend but *stand* there; to continue at so high a pitch, to be constant in truth and piety, that will be hard indeed, and bring more difficulties to contest with.”—*Mark Frank*. The devout and sincere worshipper is admitted into the arena of the heavenly temple, his spiritual vision is intensified, he becomes familiar with the deeper truths of God, he catches glimpses of unearthly glories, he is filled with the ecstasy of unutterable emotions.

II. That the true worshipper must possess a moral fitness (ver. 4). There must be—1. *Rectitude of conduct*. “He that hath clean hands.” The ceremonially unclean were not allowed to touch the sacred things of the Temple, and certainly the morally impure, whose hands are defiled with wrong-doing, can-

not enter into hallowed fellowship with God. The conscience that is not upright in the practical common-place duties of life cannot be sincere and blameless in the solemn worship of God. 2. *Purity of heart*. “And a pure heart.” It is not enough for the outward life to be consistent, the inward experience must be holy. The inner life is everything to us; if we are wrong there, we are wrong everywhere and in everything. There is a moral sympathy between the worshipper and the worshipped, and the tendency is to become increasingly like the object of our adoration. The holy God can accept nothing but what is the offering of a holy heart. Hence the perpetual need of the sanctifying merits of the great Mediator: without His aid, the best effort of the worshipper is imperfect and impure. 3. *Truthfulness of thought and speech*. “Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” “*Unto vanity, i.e., either* (1.) *the perishing things of earth* (Job xv. 31); or, (2.) *falsehood* (Job xxxi. 5), which signification passes over into a wider one of moral evil in general (cxix. 37); or, (3.) *false gods, idols* (xxx. 6). It may be taken here in the widest sense of all that the human heart puts in the place of God.”—*Perowne*. Truthfulness in heart and lip is demanded. “God will have nothing to do with liars except to cast them into the

lake of fire. Every liar is a child of the devil, and will be sent home to his father. A false declaration, a fraudulent statement, a cooked account, a slander, a lie,—all these may suit the assembly of the ungodly, but are detested among true saints: how could they have fellowship with the God of truth, if they did not hate every false way.”—*Spurgeon*.

III. That the true worshipper is assured of the Divine benediction. “He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of His salvation” (ver. 5). “*Righteousness*, not in the New Testament sense of justification but in the Old Testament acceptance of inward and outward holiness; but still even this regarded as a *gift* from the God of his salvation.” The blessing of God rested on the family of Obed-Edom while the ark remained in the vicinity of his dwelling. Blessings cluster around the sanctuary, and the eager and earnest worshipper gathers them there to his everlasting enrichment. Many leave the sanctuary in a poorer condition than when they came, because of their moral inability to appreciate and take in the offered good. “He filleth the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away.”

IV. That the true worshipper is the representative of a distinctive

and privileged class. “This is the generation of them that seek Him, that seek Thy face, O Jacob” (ver. 6). In all ages there have been *seekers after God*; and all seekers who have possessed the moral qualities enumerated in these verses are recognised as true worshippers. “He who longs to see his friend when he passes takes care to clear the mist from the window, lest by any means his friend should go by unobserved.” Men spend years of study in seeking the solution to a mathematical problem, in perfecting a mechanical instrument, or in verifying a scientific discovery. A whole lifetime cannot be better spent than in seeking after God. Such seekers make the grandest discoveries, and confer the greatest blessings on the world. It is said that JOHN WELSH, of Scotland, often leaped out of his bed at midnight, wrapped a plaid around him, and wrestled with the Lord till the breaking of day. His preaching was irresistible when he came to his pulpit from these *Penuels* of pleading with his God.

LESSONS : 1. *Divine help is necessary to worship God acceptably.* 2. *Acceptable worship is productive of the greatest blessings.* 3. *The outward life should be in harmony with the deepest experiences of the heart.*

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF THE GLORIOUS KING.

(Verses 7-10.)

“The festal procession has now reached the gates of the city of Zion. The singers go before, the minstrels follow after, and in the midst of these is the ark, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of Hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubim (2 Sam. vi. 2); so that the entry of the ark is the entry of Jehovah Himself into Zion (Numb. x. 35). By a sublime figure the poet bids ‘the everlasting gates’ of that grey old fortress be lifted up; for the greatest and most glorious of all Kings is He who now enters in, to claim it for Himself.”—*Perowne*. But we cannot overlook the prophetic and typical reference of this magnificent psalm, as pointing to

that period when Christ as the King of glory, after having gained access to all hearts, in all nations, shall enter His heavenly palace and take His seat on that throne before which all the ransomed will bow and render everlasting homage. *The triumphal entry of the glorious King.*

I. Will be into a palace of enduring splendour. “Ye everlasting doors” (ver. 7, 9). “Doors were often taken from their hinges when Easterns would show welcome to a guest, and some doors were drawn up and down like a portcullis, and may possibly have protruded from the top: thus literally lifting up their heads.” But the imagery

is highly poetical, and describes the vast, expansive, and generous welcome with which the conquering monarch is greeted when entering His heavenly home. The most gorgeous and strongly-built palace of earth is doomed to crumble and perish ; it may become the prison and the grave of those who entered it flushed with conquest and elate with joy. But the heavenly temple knows no decay,—its beauties are unfading, its doors are ever open, its freedom untrammelled. “The gates of it shall not be shut at all by day ; for there shall be no night there” (Rev. xxi. 25). “Heaven’s gates are called *everlasting*, because they shall endure for ever, or because they be the doors unto the life which is everlasting.” —*John Boys*.

II. Will be in the character of a mighty conqueror. “The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” (ver. 8). He has fought the grim, fierce conflict with evil and all the powers of hell, and won a signal and complete victory. And now He is welcomed as a warrior, strong as God Himself,—as one who was wounded, but whose scars are healed ; as one who was dead, but is alive again,—whose soul was once exceeding sorrowful even unto death, while the sun was darkened and the rocks were rent as if in sympathy with their struggling and suffering Lord, but who has conquered sorrow, and sin, and the grave, and is entering into the coveted joy He has so bravely won.

III. Will be attended by a brilliant throng of celestial hosts. “The Lord of hosts ; He is the King of glory” (ver. 10). Of all the triumphal processions of antiquity, perhaps none exceeded in pride and magnificence that of Aurelian, in the city of Rome. The pomp was opened by twenty elephants, four royal tigers, and above two hundred of the most curious animals from every climate of the North, the East, and the South. The ambassadors from the most remote parts of the earth, all remarkable by their rich or singular dresses, displayed the fame and power of the Roman Emperor. The victories of Aurelian were attested by a long train of captives who reluctantly attended his triumph,

among whom was the beauteous figure of Zenobia, the Syrian Queen, confined by fetters of gold, and almost fainting under the intolerable weight of jewels. (*Vide Gibbon’s “Decline and Fall.”*) But infinitely, beyond all earthly comparison will be the grand triumphal entry of the heavenly King into the everlasting city ! The hour is coming when, in loud and rapturous strains, the gates of heaven shall be bidden to enlarge themselves, and the portals of eternity to unfold ; and angels, principalities, and powers, with the innumerable multitude of the redeemed, shall attend the Divine conqueror in His exultant entrance into His rightful possession. Neither He nor His ransomed ones shall struggle more. The King of saints has conquered, and they in Him : they shall now share in His victory, His kingdom, His glory, and in His eternity.

IV. Will be the occasion of inexpressible joy to the universe. Earth is too narrow to hold the gladness ; heaven is invoked to share it. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.” The inquiry of heaven, trembling with a rapture, which it strives in vain to suppress, as if the anticipated response would be a too great excess of joy, “Who is this King of glory ?” is answered by the thundering plaudits of innumerable voices, every tone ringing with transport, “The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory !” It is said that the battle between the Romans and Carthaginians at Thrasymene was fought amid such terrific noise and fury created by the combatants, that

“An earthquake reeled unheedingly away !”

So the shout of joy that shall greet the triumphant Monarch of the skies, shall drown all other sounds, even the loudest convulsions of nature, and shall fill the heavenly welkin with everlasting echoes.

“Throw wide your portals, Oh ye heavenly gates,
And let His ransomed train exulting pass !
Come forth ! O Conqueror, in Thy royal robes,
For Thou alone
Hast triumphed o’er Thy foes ; and now
Thou bear’st

Upon Thy vesture and Thy thigh the name
Of King of kings. Come, then, and take
Thy throne,
For Thine it is by right, too long usurped.
Thine is the kingdom, all the power is
Thine
For ever; and to Thee—alone to Thee shall
endless praise
And everlasting glory be ascribed!"

LESSONS: 1. *Evil will not always dominate.* 2. *Strive, by conquering the evil within thee, to gain a moral fitness to participate in the triumph of the glorious King.* 3. *Accept, believingly, the help of the Divine conqueror.*

PSALM XXV.

INTRODUCTION.

"David is pictured in this psalm as in a faithful miniature. His holy trust, his many conflicts, his great transgression, his bitter repentance, and his deep distresses are all here; so that we see the very heart of 'the man after God's own heart.' It is evidently a composition of David's later days, for he mentions the sins of his youth, and, from its painful references to the craft and cruelty of his many foes, it will not be too speculative a theory to refer it to the period when Absalom was heading the great rebellion against him. This has been styled the second of the seven penitential psalms. It is the mark of a true saint that his sorrows remind him of his sins, and his sorrow for sin drives him to his God."—*Spurgeon*. "The psalm hardly admits of formal division. It is a prayer for instruction and forgiveness. Its prevailing thought is that God is the teacher of the afflicted and the guide of the erring: and this is constantly repeated, either in the way of statement or of prayer."—*Perowne*.

INVARIABLE TOPICS FOR PRAYER.

(Verses 1-7.)

I. That all prayer should be addressed to Jehovah. "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul" ver. 1. *Do I bear my soul.* The bearing of the soul to the Lord signifies the longing of the heart after Him. When in distress, the psalmist does not, like the ungodly, draw his soul at one time in this direction, and at another time in that; does not seek to catch now at this, now at that *ignis fatuus* of human help; but goes straight with all his desire to God, and rests in His protection."—*Hengstenberg*. The call to devotion in the early church was *sursum corda*, up with your hearts. Some lift up their hearts to vanity, and idolise a creation of man, or the soulless and unresponsive forces of Nature, or an assumptious sacerdotal subordinate. But the only legitimate object of worship, to whom prayer can be acceptably offered, is God. "A carnal man can as little lift up his heart in prayer as a mole can fly. A David finds it a hard task, since the best heart is lumpish, and naturally beareth downwards, as the poise of a clock, as the lead of a net. Let us therefore 'lay aside every weight,

and the sin that doth so easily beset us,' and pray to God to draw us up to Himself, as the loadstone doth the iron."—*Trapp*.

II. That prayer should be offered that our enemies may have no ground to taunt us with the failure of our trust in God. "O my God, I trust in Thee; let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me" (ver. 2). The enemies of religion cannot understand the principle of faith, which fastens on the unseen, and confidently looks for the promised good. They have faith in nothing but the *demonstrable*, and frequently taunt the believer with fanaticism, and prophesy the utter failure of his expectations from God. In a sensitive mind this is hard to bear, and the more so, that the slightest suspicion is cast on the veracity and faithfulness of God. The best of men have enemies: the determination to do the right is quite enough to rouse the opposition of some men; and the discomfort of God's people would occasion them the most malicious joy. 1. *The sincere believer will not suffer failure.* "None that wait on Thee shall be

ashamed" (ver. 3). The words emphatically express an eternal and unchanging truth. When by prayer we come near to God, by faith we rest upon Him: and to him who prays and believes all things are possible. He can never be put to confusion who humbly seeks Divine guidance; and the faith whose grapnels are firmly fixed in the Divine Righteousness can never be overturned. Trouble widens our sympathies. Though the psalmist had burden enough of his own, he felt for others in similar circumstances, and rejoiced in the assurance of their triumph. 2. *Failure is the fate of the perfidious.* "Let them be ashamed which transgress without cause" (ver. 3). *They shall be ashamed who are faithless without cause.* He who transgresses without cause is one who acts treacherously towards God and man. All who trust in their own craftiness and act with wilful dishonesty and perfidiousness shall be disappointed of what they grasped at, and be covered with everlasting shame. Shame shall recoil upon the shameless perpetrator of sin—the disloyal and faithless transgressor.

III. That prayer should be offered for Divine guidance.

1. *In the ways of God.* "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths." The ways of God are often dark, mysterious, circuitous, and painful to walk in, but they are safe and lead to peace and happiness. The pride and presumption of man often impel him to shape out a way for himself; and it often terminates in disaster and ruin. (Prov. xiv. 12.) The ways of God are always better than our own: it should be our continual anxiety to become acquainted with, and walk in, them. "The ways and stairs of God are known to no creature so well as to Himself; therefore He can give us the best instruction in them. It is not enough to be taught of men; we must go to school to God—that is, resign ourselves obediently to the guidance and training of His Holy Spirit."—*Starke.*

2. *In the truth of God.* "Lead me in Thy truth and teach me; for Thou art the God of my salvation" (ver. 5).

The truth specially desired is that which reveals salvation. The whole plan of redemption, from its first dim promise to its fullest development in later times, is an imposing manifestation of the truthfulness of Jehovah. The way to know truth is to feel it; experience is a test impossible to ignore. All moral precepts are based on Divine truths. To be well versed in the truth of God, and to experience its power in the government of life, will save us from the fate of the faithless ones who are put to shame.

3. *Prayer must be persistent.* "On Thee do I wait all the day." The more we realise our dependence and need, the more tenaciously do we cling to God. Many rich blessings have been lost for want of perseverance in prayer. Not to persevere in prayer is to risk the loss of all we ever gained. Patience is an important element of success. "To patient faith the prize is sure."

IV. That prayer should be offered for Divine mercy.

1. *Divine mercy is unfailing.* "Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies and Thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old" (ver. 6). They are from eternity. Mercy has ever been an attribute of Jehovah; and He cannot be unlike Himself: He cannot deny His character. If He were at any time to cease revealing Himself to man as a God of mercy, it would be tantamount to His proving untrue to Himself. The mercies and love of God are indeed infinite and everlasting; but it needs infinite mercy and everlasting love to pardon our uncounted sins. The greatest blessings of life are, like mercy, very ancient—as light, air, water, and earth-fruits. "Divine love is an eternal fountain that never leaves off running while a vessel is empty or capable of holding more. It stands open to all comers: therefore come; and if you have not sufficient of your own, go and borrow vessels, empty vessels not a few; pay your debts out of it, and live on the rest (2 Kings iv. 7) to eternity."—*Elisha Coles* (1678).

2. *Divine mercy is invoked for the pardon of sin.* "Remember not the

sins of my youth, nor my transgressions ; according to Thy mercy remember Thou me, for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord" (ver. 7). How many would like to return to the happy time of youth ! There is an exquisite pathos in those lines of Goethe :—

"Give me, oh ! give me back the days of youth,

Poor, yet how rich !—my glad inheritance,
The inextinguishable love of truth,

While life's realities were all romance.

Give me, oh ! give youth's passions unconfined,

The rush of joy that felt almost like pain,
Its hate, its love, its own tumultuous mind ;

Give me my youth again !"

But it may not, it cannot be. We are young but once. And oh ! how much of that past youth-time would we like to live over again ! How many of its wild, mad, sinful actions could we wish undone ! How many are there of the sins of our younger days we can our-

selves remember ; and, alas ! how many more which are now unknown to ourselves, and forgotten by all but God ! "The world winks at the sins of young men ; and yet they are none so little after all : the bones of our youthful feasting at Satan's table will stick painfully in our throats when we are old men. He who presumes upon his youth is poisoning his old age. How large a tear may wet this page as some of us reflect upon the past !" — *Spurgeon*. The recollection of our transgressions shows the need of mercy, and prompts the prayer for it. If we forget our sins, we shall never appreciate the grace which provides for their removal. The cry of the penitent should be—O Lord, remember not my sins, but remember me !

LESSONS :—1. *A sinful soul is never in want of a topic for prayer.* 2. *The soul finds its true safety by trusting in God.* 3. *To hear and answer prayer are both acts of Divine mercy.*

THE HIDDEN WAYS OF GOD MADE PLAIN.

(Verses 8–15.)

I. That the character of God is a guarantee of infallible direction. "Good and upright is the Lord. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth" (ver. 8, 10). Because God is good, therefore He will give His children His Spirit for their direction ; and because He is upright, it must of necessity be a good and most certain one.—*Diodati*. We value promises of help according to the character of the person who makes them. All the promises of God are based on His infinite perfections. There can never be any real disagreement between the nature and the actions of Jehovah : His *paths*, like Himself, are mercy and truth. "*Paths* signify the tracks or ruts made by the wheels of waggons by often passing over the same ground. Mercy and truth are the paths in which God constantly walks in reference to the children of men ; and so frequently does He show them mercy, and so frequently does He fulfil His truth, that His paths are easily discerned. How frequent, how deeply indented, and how multi-

plied are those tracks to every family and individual ! Wherever we go, we see that God's mercy and truth have been there by the deep tracks they have left behind them." — *Clarke*. "These paths—the ways in which He leads His people—are mercy (loving-kindness), for the salvation of men is the end thereof ; and truth, for they give proof at every step of the certainty of His promises. Grace is their Alpha and truth their Omega." — *Delitzsch*. As coals feed the fire, so the remembrance of the truths of our faith should keep alive the flame of our prayers.

II. The ways of God are made known to the morally needy. These are alluded to under varied phases of character.

1. *Sinners*. "Therefore will He teach sinners in the way" (ver. 8)—those who have erred and strayed from the way—those whose sins have assumed gigantic proportions. "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great" (ver. 11). Nothing is so blinding and misleading as sin, and it is never so

dangerously deceptive as when it wears the semblance of virtue. Naturalists tell us that certain birds and insects have the curious faculty of assuming a likeness to the vegetation among which they sport themselves—that the South American heron can assume a perpendicular position, so as to look exactly like the reeds of its native district, that the leaf-butterfly of Sumatra is readily mistaken for one of the leaves among which it alights, and that the walking-stick insect of New Zealand can closely resemble an upright twig. So sin has the dangerous power of assuming a tone and attitude of certain virtues. But the Divine eye detects the fallacy, and the Divine hand graciously guides into the right way.

2. *The humble.* "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way" (ver. 9). Those who are afflicted and distressed about sin, who desire to be delivered from it and led in the right way. The proud despise instruction, and are left to the hardness of their hearts. "Pride and anger have no place in the school of Christ. The Master Himself is 'meek and lowly in heart;' much more, surely, ought the scholars to be so. He who hath no sense of his ignorance can have no desire or capability of knowledge, human or Divine."—*G. Horne.*

3. *The perplexed.* "For He shall pluck my feet out of the net" (ver. 15). A time comes in the mental history of most when the mind is harassed with doubts, and is like a restless, fluttering bird caught in the snare of the fowler. Or, it may be, we are suddenly overtaken with calamity and plunged into the darkness of despair. At these times God comes to our rescue, allays our fears, and lifts us out of our entanglements. The greatest distresses of life are only temporary.

"I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud.
It is but for a time: I press God's lamp
Close to my breast: its splendours, soon or
late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge ere
long."
—BROWNING.

III. That the deeper revelations of God are reserved for the morally good.

1. *For the obedient.* "Unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (ver. 10). Obedience is the organ of spiritual enlightenment (John vii. 17). The ways and commandments of God cannot be fairly and accurately judged as simply apprehended by the understanding. To see their Godlike beauty and feel their holiest force, they must be *obeyed*. "Keepers of the covenant shall be kept by the covenant; those who follow the Lord's commands shall find the Lord's mercy following them."

2. *For the God-fearing.* "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (ver. 14). The great secret of all truth is hid in God. He is Himself the embodiment and ultimate end of truth, and He alone can impart it, and He will impart it only to them who fear Him. "What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall He teach in the way that he shall choose" (ver. 12). The God-fearing are lowered in the depths of the heavenly mysteries, and discover the unsearchable. "Saints have the key of heaven's hieroglyphics; they can unriddle celestial enigmas; they are initiated into the fellowship of the skies; they have heard words which it is not possible for them to repeat to their fellows. He who does not know the meaning of this verse (ver. 14), will never learn it from a commentary: let him look to the cross, for the secret lies there."—*Spurgeon.*

3. *For the earnest and persevering inquirer.* "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord" (ver. 15). The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth, wandering over a thousand different objects, but fastening on none, and learning nothing. But the humble and patient inquirer carefully investigates the minutest phenomena that promises to lead to the interpretation of truth, and conduct the mind up to the great source of truth. There are some things that need no inquiry about; they are vile on the face of them; and every year of our lives we grow more convinced that it is wisest and best to fix our attention on the beautiful and the good, and dwell as little as possible on the evil and the false. The eye that turns

its inquiring gaze towards God will make the grandest discoveries and see the most entrancing visions. The true attitude of humble and reverential confidence consists in directing the eyes of the soul "ever toward the Lord."

IV. That the revelation of the hidden ways of God is morally satisfying. "His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the earth" (ver. 13). The soul of the pious shall pitch her tent and lodge in goodness as in a fruitful land,—shall reach her home and possess it for ever. Moses made the promise "to possess the land" (to inherit the earth) in a literal sense to his people (Deut. iv. 22, xl. 5, xxxvi. 6, 18); but since his days it has

been used to denote perfect peace, as is apparent from Prov. ii. 21; Ps. xxxvii. 8, 9.—*Tholuck*. The posterity of the good are blessed, though the inheritance they possess as the result of many prayers is often abused. Parents should not only pray *for* but *with* their children; and it will be strange indeed if those prayers do not bear gracious fruit in the future career of their offspring. There is nothing so satisfying to the soul as a sight of God.

LESSONS:—1. *Trust in God when life is involved in darkness and mystery.* 2. *God only can reveal the secret of happiness.* 3. *A moral fitness is necessary to understand the hidden ways of God.*

TROUBLE AND THE WAY OUT OF IT.

(Verses 16–22.)

I. That sin is the prolific source of all trouble. 1. *A sense of personal sin is an intensified form of trouble* (ver. 16–18). The language of these three verses is pathetically expressive of conscious sin. "Have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: look upon mine affliction and my pain." What words can more graphically depict the sorrow, the loneliness, the anguish, the utter wretchedness of a soul pressed down under the burden of its sins! There is an inseparable connection between sin and sorrow; and yet how slow men are to see it. Only the soul smitten with a genuine penitence understands the true nature of sin, and the enormous evils of which it is the cause. Often when the spirit is most deeply troubled, when the pain is sharpest, when our self-reproach is bitterest, — then God is nearest to strengthen and deliver. Our greatest blessings have sprung out of the vortex of our greatest troubles. 2. *Trouble is increased by the number and ferocity of our enemies.* "Consider mine enemies, for they are many; and they hate me with a cruel hatred" (ver. 19). The enemies of a good man multiply with his misfortunes, and the more helpless he is, the more furiously they assail him.

"No hate so cruel as that which is unreasonable and unjust. A man can forgive one who has injured him, but one whom he has injured he hates implacably." The madness of cruelty raves the more violently when it feels its impotency to inflict all the injury it designs.

II. That trouble shall not be permitted to overwhelm the good. "Oh, keep my soul and deliver me: let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in Thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on Thee" (ver. 20, 21). In this world of contradictions and suffering, the best of men are not free from trouble; but they have the assurance of help which shall render them invincible and exultant in the fiercest trial. Their God-given virtues form an impassable cordon around them, and their faith in the unseen Protector constitutes an all-encompassing shield. The presence of Christ in trouble banishes fear. Alone, Dante feared to enter the dismal *Inferno*; but with Virgil, the great and good, to guide his steps and support his hand, he descended fearlessly into the abode of woe. So, relying on our own strength, we enter the valley of darkness, and, beset with fears, we find it the valley of sorrow and of

death. But, trusting the Almighty arm, our dismay vanishes; we see it to be only the valley of the *shadow*, and even the *shadow* He has turned for us into the morning. Our trust is founded on the certainty of God's righteousness; and though encompassed with floods and beaten with storms, it stands, for it is founded on a rock. There is ever a shelter for us in God, and our souls are safe in His hands.

III. That prayer to God is the infallible method of deliverance from the greatest trouble (ver. 22). Personal trouble deepens and widens our sympathy for others. Observe, the cry is not simply, "Oh, keep my soul, and deliver me" (ver. 20); but the prayer takes a more generous and comprehensive sweep, "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles" (ver. 22). "If

Thou wilt not pity and help me, yet spare Thy people who suffer for my sake and in my sufferings."—*M. Pool*. They who have thus struggled with their own doubts and sins, and by God's grace have conquered them, must ever feel they have an interest in the conflicts of the church militant. They who pray for themselves are taught to pray for others: they, again and again, commend their suffering brethren of the true Israel to that Almighty Father and all-gracious God who has deigned to deliver them from all their troubles. True prayer is the precursor and lever of redeeming power.

LESSONS:—1. *The cure of sin is the cure of trouble.* 2. *The potency of prayer is never so thoroughly tested and triumphantly vindicated as in time of trouble.*

PSALM XXVI.

INTRODUCTION.

The date of this psalm is uncertain. It is supposed by some to refer to the assassination of Ishbosheth (2 Sam. iv. 5-12); and by others to the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. xv.-xviii.); but it is more probable that it was composed, like many others, in the dark time of Saul's persecution (1 Sam. xviii.-xxiv.). "It has some points of resemblance, both in thought and expression, to the last. Both open with the same declaration of trust in God (xxv. 2; xxvi. 1); in both there is the same prayer that God would redeem (xxv. 22, xxvi. 11), and be gracious (xxv. 16, xxvi. 11) to His servants. Other points of contact may be found in xxv. 21, xxvi. 11, and xxv. 5, xxvi. 3. There is, however, this marked difference between the two, that there are wanting in this psalm those touching confessions of sinfulness and pleadings for forgiveness which in the other are thrice repeated. Here is only the avowal of conscious uprightness,—an avowal made as in the sight of the searcher of hearts, and deriving, no doubt, much of its intensity and almost impassioned force from the desire on the part of the singer to declare his entire separation from and aversion to the vain and evil men by whom he was surrounded."—*Perowne*.

THE UPRIGHT MAN PLEADING FOR JUSTICE IN THE COURT OF HEAVEN

(Verses 1-12.)

Calumny has been common in all ages. Jesus Christ Himself was defamed, and His disciples are warned to expect similar treatment from their enemies (John xv. 20; Matt. v. 11). For such as suffer thus, the example of David is rich in counsel and comfort. In time of trouble, he turns to God for redress and refuge. He appeals from a world where "the foundations are out of course" to a world where all is righteousness and peace. He appeals from

man, whose judgments are false, to God, who judgeth righteously.

In considering David's appeal, mark—

I. That it was made to the right Judge (ver. 1). "*Judge me, O Lord.*" He had been wronged. His enemies had suspected and denounced him. Even the very king, anointed to do justly and to defend the oppressed, had turned against him, and madly sought his life (1 Sam. xxiv. 11). But, though perplexed, he is not in despair; though

persecuted, he is not forsaken. He appeals to God. "*Judge me, O Lord.*" Take up my cause, vindicate my character, deliver me from the machinations and malice of my foes. This is just like what he said to Saul at Engedi (1 Sam. xxiv. 12), "The Lord judge between me and thee" (ver. 15), "The Lord be judge, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."

It is a solemn thing to stand before an earthly judge, but it is a far more solemn thing to come before the judgment-seat of God. This is the court of last resort. Here the Judge is personally acquainted with all the facts and circumstances of the case, and His judgments are absolutely just and final (1 Sam. ii. 3).

II. It was presented in a proper spirit.

1. *Deep seriousness.* He feels that he is in the presence of the great Searcher of hearts. His very life is at stake; but there are two things which sustain him: (1.) *Conscious integrity.* "*For I have walked in mine integrity.*" This is very bold. It startles us to hear such words from a sinful man. We are almost ready to say, "Surely this is to err, and to fall into pride and self-righteousness." But the words are no boast. They have the ring of sincerity and truth. David does not claim moral perfection, but uprightness of heart. He felt that he had been true. In spite of sore provocations, he had not returned evil for evil; though coming short in many things, he had honestly endeavoured to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. "*Walked:*" this implied earnestness and definiteness of purpose, steadfast and delightful progress in the right. "*Integrity*" was the air in which he had lived and moved. "Innocency itself is no fence to the name, though it is to the bosom, against the darts of calumny."—*M. Henry.* (2.) *Confidence in God.* "*I have trusted also in the Lord: therefore I shall not slide.*" There was everything in God to inspire trust. He was infinitely just and good. In His laws and government He was wholly and eternally op-

posed to all evil. However it might be amongst men, the Judge of all the earth could not but do right. David had trusted in Him in the past, and he would trust in Him for ever. Had he been conscious of insincerity, he could not have acted thus. Guile puts a bar between the soul and God; whereas, when there is no guile, there can be frank and confiding approach, and unwavering confidence. What a comforting thought that there is a God in heaven who judgeth righteously! Happy are those who trust in Him.

"True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect and still revere himself
In lowliness of heart."—WORDSWORTH.

2. *Readiness to submit to the most thorough investigation* (ver. 2). "*Examine me, O Lord, and prove me.*" The reference here is to the methods by which metals were tested (Ps. xii. 6, lxvi. 10). As gold and silver were tried in the furnace, as Israel had been tried in Egypt and the wilderness, so he was ready to be tried (Deut. iv. 20, viii. 2). "*Try my reins and my heart.*" The "reins" may refer to the lower, and the "heart" to the higher passions of the soul. He thus craves that not only the outward but the inner man should be tested. He would hide nothing. He desires to be perfectly open, and to have all laid bare and sifted to the very core of his being. Whatever the Lord saw to be just, let Him do. The deepest desire of his heart was to be right. Let all dross of self-deception and sin be purged away in the fire of the Great Refiner, and let the true and the good remain. "The fining-pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov. xvii. 3).

"What lives by life that is not Thine,
I yield it to Thy righteous doom;
What yet resists Thy law Divine,
O may Thy fire of love consume."

3. *Humble acquiescence in the result* (ver. 3). "*For Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in Thy truth.*" This implies that God's love was the life of his heart. He understood and appreciated His "loving-

kindness." It was "before his eyes" (cf. Deut. vi. 8). It was the object of his constant meditation and delight. When he thought thereon, he could not but give thanks and take courage. "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John iv. 18). *God's will was the law of his life.* That he might know and keep God's commandments was his continual prayer. "*I have walked in Thy truth.*" This had been his habit. It was upon this principle that his life had been regulated. Hence he felt no fear. Whatever was brought to light, whether to his praise or to his blame, could not but be for his good. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Ps. xcvi. 11). "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved; but he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God" (John iii. 20, 21). Blessed are they whose hearts are right with God. Let trials come, let them be subjected to sore discipline and heavy judgments, still they have peace within.

"What'er my God ordains is right,—
My light, my life is He.
He cannot will me aught but good—
I trust Him utterly;
For well I know,
In joy or woe,
We yet shall see as sunlight clear,
How faithful was our Guardian here."

III. Supported by ample evidence

1. *Negative* (ver. 4, 5). The wicked are here characterised as "vain persons," "dissemblers," "evil-doers." These terms are terribly significant. They are revelations of the heart. They are proofs of a state of society utterly alien and hostile to the life of God. David, in vindication of himself, declares his entire separation from all such people. He expresses his *repugnance to their society*. A man is known by the company he keeps. There is a power, for good or for evil, in the society we love. To be allied with the good is a blessing and an honour, but to be confederate with the bad is to be doomed to infamy. David could appeal to his past life. He had no relish for

the society of the bad. "*I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers.*" He expresses his *hatred of their character*. His language is very strong: "I have *hated* the congregation of evil-doers." It was not that he hated them as men, but that he hated their spirit and conduct—their character. "To hate the person, the existence, of any man, is wrong; it is to hate the workmanship of God. But to hate the *character* of a bad man is right, and even obligatory. God made the person, man made the character; and a bad character is an offence to the Almighty, and an injury to the universe; therefore it is holy to hate it."—*Dr. D. Thomas*. 2. *Positive* (ver. 6–8). "*I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord; that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Thy wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.*" David here declares his love for God's house and worship. Instead of consorting with the wicked, his delight was with the people of God. Mark his *earnest preparation* (ver. 6), "*I will wash,*" &c. The expression is figurative (cf. Gen. xx. 5; Deut. xxi. 6; Matt. xxvii. 24). It is taken from Exod. xxx. 17–21, where Aaron and his sons are commanded to wash their hands and their feet before going into the tabernacle. "David, willing to express his coming with a pure heart to pray to God, doth it by this similitude of a priest, that, as a priest washes his hands, and then offers oblation, *so had he constantly joined purity and devotion together.*"—*Hammond*. Mark his *devout attendance upon ordinances* (ver. 6, 7). "*So will I compass,*" &c. "The meaning is, that he will go round and round the altar, looking at it, looking at the blood on its base, and the blood on each of the four horns, towards north, south, east, and west, and beholding the smoke of the fire, and thinking of the sacrificial victim that has died there,—all in the way of joyful thanks for salvation provided for men."—*A. A. Bonar*. Mark his *great delight in the public worship*

of God (ver. 8). "*Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house,*" &c. It was the place where God's glory dwelt, where God made Himself known as a just God and a Saviour. God's presence is the attraction and life of all true worship. We should attend upon Divine ordinances with diligence, preparation, and prayer. If you come to church fresh from the company of the gay and the thoughtless, and with no real seriousness of spirit, it is no wonder if you are not benefited. But come with humility, come with sincere love of truth, come with hope in the boundless mercy of God and the grace of Christ, and you will not come in vain. Instructed and refreshed, your grateful song will be, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. xxviii. 17).

IV. Enforced by strong and impassioned arguments (ver. 9-11). "*Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me.*" He here prays that God would judge him (ver. 1), i.e., declare what he is by separating him from the wicked. But, in fact, his prayer is an argument, intensely earnest and powerful. That he should be condemned with the wicked was—1. Contrary to the spirit of his past life. "*Sinners,*" "*bloody men,*" men whose evil designs led to violence and crime, and whose hands were "full of bribes" to corrupt and to betray, surrounded him. But though he could not altogether avoid them, he had always regarded them with aversion. Their character was hateful to him, and he

abhorred their company as hell. 2. *Revolting to his holiest aspirations and hopes.* He was unchanged in his purpose. Truth was truth, and right was right, whatever men said or did. He was resolved to die as he had lived. His heart was fixed. But he shrank with horror from the doom of the wicked. 3. *Inconsistent with his faith in God's justice and mercy.* "*Redeem me, and be merciful unto me.*" He is far from pride and presumption. He does not demand, but supplicates. His exclusive dependence is upon God. There was a moral impossibility in his being forsaken. "As there is a gathering-time for the fruits of the earth, so there is a gathering-time for men. Death is the reaper. With his scythe he mows down the generations, and Justice gathers whom he mows,—some to misery, some to bliss. Who would be gathered with the sinners in the great world of retribution?"—*Dr. D. Thomas.*

V. Concludes with the expression of the most undoubting assurance (ver. 12). "*My foot standeth in an even place; in the congregations will I bless the Lord.*" "His prayer has been heard. He is safe. He stands on the open tableland, where he has room to move, and where his enemies cannot hem him in, and therefore he fulfils the resolve made before (ver. 7), and publicly pours out his thanksgivings to God."—*Perowne.* But the words of the Psalmist may be understood as looking further than this earth. They not only imply present sure standing in the love of God, but they breathe the spirit of holy joy, in view of the serene and blissful heights of heaven, where there shall be no possibility of danger or of falling any more.

A GLORIOUS PICTURE.

(Verse 3.)

I. The subject. "*Thy loving-kindness.*" Creation, providence, redemption. What subject could be more noble and attractive?

II. The position. "*Before mine eyes.*" Much depends on the placing of a picture. The most excellent should

have the most honourable place. "Before mine eyes." Before the mind, the conscience, the heart. To be studied with adoring love and delight.

III. The effect upon the beholders. 1. Quickening. 2. Illuminating. 3. Transforming. Soothes,

strengthens, ennobles. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image." What interest has this picture for us?

With what feelings do we regard it? "We needs must love the highest when we see it."—*Tennyson*.

SURVEY OF REDEMPTION WORK.

(Verses 6, 7.)

- I. IT IS A FINISHED WORK.
- II. IT IS A WONDROUS WORK.

- III. IT IS AN INSPIRING WORK.
- IV. IT IS A GOD-GLORIFYING WORK.

LOVE OF GOD'S HOUSE.

(Verse 8.)

What the Tabernacle and the Temple were to the pious Jew, the house where we worship God should be to us. It should be dear because—

I. Hallowed by the Divine presence (2 Chron. vi. 18; Acts vii. 49; Exod. xxv. 21, 22; Matt. xviii. 20).

II. Consecrated to the holiest fellowship. "The congregation." More; though physically shut in by the walls, in spirit we enter into fellowship with all God's saints.

III. Devoted to the cause of right-

eousness and love. Not sectarianism, but "the truth as in Jesus." "We preach Christ crucified." Our ceaseless prayer is "Thy kingdom come."

IV. Endeared by the most sacred associations. Here our fathers worshipped. Here our hearts have often been revived by the word of truth, and regaled by the bread of life sent down from heaven (Ps. lxxxvii. 2-5).

V. Suggestive of the noblest hopes and inspirations (Matt. xxviii. 20; Heb. xii. 22-29; and 1 Thess. iv. 13-18).

PERDITION DREADFUL.

(Verse 9.)

I. The good man is chiefly concerned about his soul. Many anxious as to health, earthly comforts, the security of their goods, &c. But the cry of the godly is "my soul." Not in selfishness. 1. The soul is the man. 2. The salvation of the soul is necessary for the glory of God and the true ends of our being. 3. The soul is in desperate peril, and none but Christ can save.

II. The good man knows that the destiny of the soul is settled at death. "Gather not my soul," &c. Death comes to all. "Gather" (*cf.* Gen. xxv. 8, xxxv. 29, xlix. 29-33; Numb. xx. 24, xxvii. 13. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccles. xii. 7). *Judgment*. Inferred by reason. Foreboded by conscience. Revealed by Scripture (Heb. ix. 27; Acts xvii. 31; 2 Cor. v. 10).

III. The good man recoils with

horror from being associated in destiny with the wicked. Why? 1. Because he abhors their character. 2. Their society. 3. Their doom. Evil without restraint. Misery without relief. Eternity without hope. Would we shrink from the society of the false, the impure, the revengeful, the slaves of lust and selfishness, how much more should we recoil from eternal fellowship with these and such as these!

Ver. 9, 10. Social degeneracy. A corrupt people makes a corrupt magis tracy.

Ver. 12. The connection between private and public worship.

Ver. 12. Rectitude is an "even place," as contrasted with the crooked paths of the false, the hard way of transgressors, the slippery places of the world. "Certainly, it is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth."—*Bacon*.

SINCERITY NOT ENOUGH.

(Verse 1.)

It is a false and mistaken liberality to say, "If a man be sincere, he is all right." Sincerity is necessary. Unless a man is sincere, he cannot be truly religious. But sincerity is not enough. A man may be sincere in his opinions, and yet be grievously in error. So it was with Eli (1 Sam. i. 14) when he called Hannah drunken. A man may be sincere in his religious beliefs, even to

zealotism, and yet be far off from true godliness. So it was with Saul when he made havoc of the Church, and did things which he afterwards bitterly repented (Acts xxvi. 9, 10). Sincerity implies being true to conscience; but conscience is no safe guide by itself. It needs to be cultivated and controlled by the Spirit of God.

PSALM XXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

This psalm has been referred by some to the period of David's waiting for the kingdom; by others, to the time of Absalom's rebellion. *Hengstenberg* says: "All attempts to find out any occasion to which the psalm especially referred have failed, and from this failure; we may infer either that David originally uttered the psalm from the soul of the oppressed righteous man, or that, if he wrote it in reference to a particular occasion, he generalised his own experience."

THE FEARLESSNESS OF THE GOOD.

(Verses 1-3.)

I. Springs from personal faith in God. "The Lord." This name inspires hope. Six times it is recited in the first, and seven times in the second part of the psalm. Jehovah is ever the object of true faith.

1. *Intelligent.* The cry of the earnest soul is, "Light." To this God responds. He reveals Himself in Christ. He gives His word to quicken and enlighten the soul, and to illumine its pathway up to the gates of heaven (2 Cor. iv. 6; John viii. 12; Ps. xviii. 28, xxxvi. 9, lxxxiv. 11). David was called the "Light of Israel" (2 Sam. xxi. 17), but he himself gives God the glory: "The Lord is my light." In this word he anticipates the great saying of the New Testament, "God is light" (1 John i. 5).

2. *Appropriating.* "My" is a little word, but of great significance. Only a person can say, "My." "My home," "My wife," "My child." Faith is personal. It implies recognition of the glory and preciousness of Jesus, and the receiving and resting upon Him alone for salvation. This faith is contrasted

with the faith of devils (Jas. ii. 19; 1 John v. 10-12). So also it differs vitally from mere belief in historical Christianity. It is one thing to say, "God is light," and another to say, "God is *my* light." It is one thing to cry, "The Lord He is God" (1 Kings xviii. 39), and an altogether different thing to take hold of Christ for ourselves, saying, "My Lord and my God" (John xx. 28). Luther says the marrow of the Gospels is in the pronouns "my" and "our." Let us not be content till we can say, "The Lord is *my* light." Such faith fills the heart with courage and joy (Ps. xviii. 1, 2, cxviii. 28; Song vi. 3).

3. *Soul-saving.* "Salvation" implies all that we need for our safety and good. God not merely *gives* salvation, but He *is* salvation. He that by faith has laid hold of God has all covenant blessings made sure to him. "The strength of my life:" God is the stronghold in which the believer's life is safe (Prov. xviii. 10; 2 Cor. xii. 2). "My light," "My salvation," "The strength of my

life." Here is combined all that the soul requires,—here, as from behind a triple shield, she can "fight the good fight,"—here, as in an impregnable fortress, she can hoist the banner of the cross and bid defiance to every foe.

II. Strengthened by the remembrance of past deliverances.

Memory can recall and re-live the past. When rightly used, it is a helper to faith. (Ver. 2) *Here is danger recalled.* David in imagination goes back to some time of great peril. His enemies pressed him sore. Strong and fierce as wild beasts, they thirsted for his blood (Job xix. 22; Zeph. iii. 3). So believers can recall times when they were in straits. God's enemies are our enemies. "It is a hopeful sign for us when the wicked hate us: if our foes were godly men, it would be a sore sorrow; but as for the wicked, their hatred is better than their love."—*Spurgeon.*

Here is *deliverance recorded.* David's enemies came up with haughty confidence. They counted him their sure prey; but discomfiture, strange and unexpected, befell them. "They stumbled and fell." These things rise up before him with the freshness of yesterday. It was the doing of the Lord, and the thought strengthens his heart. So it was in the encounter with Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 37). So it was at Ziklag and at other times (1 Sam. xxx. 6; Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11). Here is a lesson for us. Confidence comes of experience. The remedy we have proved we readily try again. The friend we have found faithful we trust to death. The commander under whom we have conquered we follow bravely to other fields. So should we act as to God. "The Christian is rich in *experiences*, which he wears as bracelets and keeps as his richest jewels. He calls one *Ebenezer*, 'Hitherto God hath helped'; another,

Naphtali, 'I have wrestled with God and prevailed'; another, *Gershom*, 'I was a stranger'; another, *Joseph*, 'God will yet add more'; another, *Peniel*, 'I have seen the face of God' (1 Sam. vii. 12; Gen. xxx. 8; Exod. ii. 22; Gen. xxx. 24, xxxii. 30). I have been delivered from the *lion*, therefore from the *bear*,—from the lion and the bear, therefore from the *Philistine*,—from the Philistine, therefore from *Saul*,—from Saul, therefore God will deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me blameless to His heavenly kingdom."—*J. Sheffield.*

III. Sufficient for the greatest emergencies. Imagination is a great painter. Here David conjures up a terrible scene (ver. 3). We see the mustering of the forces, we see the proud array of the army with tents and banners, we see the shock and terrors of the battle, and the strife, as if for a kingdom. And all this pictures the danger of *his* soul. Yet, in such extremity, his eye flinches not and his heart knows no fear. What sustains him? Faith in God. "In this will I be confident" (cf. Ps. iii. 6, 7). So with the saints. If enemies oppose, they can say with Peter, "We must obey God" (cf. Luther at Worms). If dangers thicken, they can cry with Paul, "None of these things move me." What terror had Ahab for Micaiah, the man who had seen God? (1 Kings xxii. 19). What cared Elisha for "the horses and chariots" at Dothan, whose eyes beheld the angels of God ranged in his defence? (2 Kings vi. 15). So, what are the hosts of darkness and all the powers of the enemy to the Christian who can say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation?" "Whom shall I fear?" The law? It is satisfied. Satan? He is conquered. Afflictions? They are sanctified. Death? It is overcome. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31).

THE SAINT'S REFUGE.

(Verses 4-6.)

"In time of trouble." It may be a storm of conscience or of providence. It may be perils from temptation or

from the malice of evil men. The soul flies to God and finds shelter.

I. Earnestly sought (ver. 4). 1

What? "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord." Like the priests, he wished to be wholly devoted to God. Like the children of the family, he desired to dwell constantly in his Father's house. Communion with God was the life of his heart. Such free, affectionate, confiding intercourse with God is greatly to be coveted, and should be sought not as the privilege of special seasons, but as a daily blessing; not as the pleasure of an hour, but as a joy for ever. 2. *Why?* "To behold the beauty of the Lord." Luther interprets this of the services of the sanctuary. But it cannot be thus limited. "Beauty" is loveliness. "Beauty of the Lord" is the loveliness of the Lord, all that makes Him an object of admiration and delight. To sinners, the "Beauty of the Lord" is "His glory as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ." "To inquire in His temple." The deepest instincts of the soul prompt to inquiry. Truth is not born with us, nor can it be obtained irrespective of our own efforts. It must be sought for its own sake. It must be wooed and won, from love, before it can be enjoyed. All right investigation, whether of God's works or God's Word, should be conducted as under the eye of God. His temple is wide as the universe. 3. *How?* With concentration of heart. "One thing." With constancy of endeavour. "That will I seek after." When David fled from Absalom, he left behind him his house, his treasures, and all the glory of his crown; but these things were as nothing compared with the worship of God (Ps. lxxiii. 5; 2 Sam. xv. 25). It is only when we make God our Alpha and Omega, the supreme object of our delight and study, that we can hope that He will reveal Himself to us. In our day, there are manifold objects to distract our attention. The claims of the world are constant and oppressive. There is the more need, therefore, for watchfulness and prayer. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name."

II. *Graciously enjoyed* (ver. 5). Here there is the best shelter in the worst danger. "Pavilion," "tent," "rock," (Lev. xxiii. 42; 2 Sam. vi. 17; Ps. ix. 14). This may express sovereign

love. It is all of God's grace. *Righteous defence.* The sinner does not hide furtively, but is led by the hand of the Prince. The deliverance is not the mere act of power, but is wrought in righteousness. God is a just God, and a Saviour. The sinner flees to Christ, not to hide from God, but to hide with God (Gen. iii. 10; Ps. cxliii. 9). *Inviolable security.* "Immutability, eternity, and infinite power here come to the aid of sovereignty and sacrifice. How blessed is the standing of the man whom God Himself sets on high above his foes upon an impregnable rock, which never can be stormed!"—*Spurgeon*. "He shall set me up upon a rock." There may be a reminiscence here of the hour when, from the top of the rock, David reproached Abner for his remissness in guarding Saul (1 Sam. xxvi. 5-16). Rock Rimmon was but a poor retreat. The fugitive may take hold of the horns of the altar, and yet perish (1 Kings ii. 29). The manslayer might reach the city of refuge, and after all be condemned. But he that trusts in the Lord shall never be moved. The attributes of God, that were once arrayed against the sinner, are now converted into a canopy for his defence.

III. *Exultingly acknowledged* (ver. 6). Here is a burst of delight, like the trumpets of jubilee (Numb. x. 10, xxix. 1). "Sacrifices of shouting," a stronger form of expression than the usual "sacrifices of thanksgiving," and equivalent to "sacrifices accompanied with the loud and glad expression of thankfulness."—*Perowne*.

Implies:

1. *Manly confidence.* "And now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me." "Two things make the head hang down—fear and shame. Hope easeth the Christian's heart of both these, and so forbids him to give any sign of a desponding mind by a dejected countenance."—*W. Gurnall* (cf. Ps. cx. 7; Luke xxi. 28). 2. *Devout gratitude.* "Therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy." This indicates the peace-offering, which was expressive of fellowship with God (Lev. ii. vii.). Since the peril was past, since the joy of salvation was

restored, he would praise God. 3. *Exulting joy.* "I will sing; yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." "Sing and celebrate." The latter verb intimates the accompaniment of instrumental

music in the worship of God. David does not speak of jubilations in his palace or feastings in his banqueting-hall, but of songs of praise in the house of God.

PRAYER FOR A TIME OF NEED.

(Verses 7-12.)

There are lights and shadows in the Christian life. We see this here. "The triumphant strain of confidence now gives way to one of sad and earnest entreaty. Is it (as Calvin) that the Psalmist sought in the former part of the psalm to comfort himself with the review of God's unfailing strength and protection, that he might with the more reason utter his prayer for help? Or is it not rather, that even while he is thus strengthening himself in his God, a sudden blast of temptation sweeps over his soul, freezing the current of his life,—some fear lest he should be forsaken, some thought of the craft and malice of his enemies,—till now the danger which threatens him is as prominent an object as the salvation and defence were before?"—*Perowne*. This prayer is characterised by—

I. Deep humility and earnestness (ver. 7). Here there is utter self-abandonment. The Psalmist casts himself, sinner as he is, upon the mercy of God. His "cry" finds vent by the "voice." This gives the more reality and force to the prayer. The craving to be heard is intense. How eagerly do we wait for the reply from a friend to an important letter! So should we watch for God's answer to our prayers. "Mercy" is the hope of sinners and the joy of saints.

II. Christ-like trust in God's word (ver. 8). "The words, *SEEK YE MY FACE*, are the words of God, which the servant of God here, as it were, takes from His mouth, that so laying them before God, he may make his appeal the more irresistible. Thou hast said, *Seek ye My face*. My heart makes these words its own, and builds upon them its resolve. It takes them up and repeats them, 'Seek ye my face.' It first claims thus thine own gracious words, O Lord,

and then its echo to those words is, 'Thy face, Lord, I will seek.' Such is the soul's dialogue with itself when it would comfort itself in God."—*Perowne*. True obedience is prompt, hearty, and unserved. Not truer is the answer of chord to chord, not readier is the response of the echo to the voice, than the reply of the heart to the call of God.

III. Grateful recognition of God's favour (ver. 9). The face of God means His favour (Ps. xxxi. 16, cxix. 58). To hide the face indicates disapproval and estrangement (Ps. lv. 1; Isa. liii. 3, lix. 2; Jer. xxxiii. 5). To put away a servant in wrath expresses the highest dissatisfaction and displeasure. David felt that to be thus treated by God would be the most terrible calamity. Hence his earnest prayer. He was God's servant, and he could not live without the sunshine of His love. The remembrance of past joys and favours made him the more bold. "*Thou hast been my help.*" One act of mercy engages God to do another. Urgent pleading rises to full confidence. "*Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.*" God's people may learn here to deprecate desertion, plead experience, expect deliverance.

IV. Steadfast reliance upon God's faithfulness amidst the failure of earthly comforts (ver. 10). During the persecution of Saul, David committed his parents to the care of the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4). We do not hear of them again. Sooner or later, children and parents must be separated. As there is no greater earthly comfort than the love of father and mother, so there is no greater earthly calamity than their loss. (Moses, Exod. ii. 6-9; Ishmael, Gen. xxi.; Ps. lxxxviii. 8, 19.) But in such a crisis, God will not fail (Isa.

xlix. 15). We may rely upon God in the greatest extremities (Ps. cxliii. 42; Tim. iv. 10). Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "I will not leave you orphans" (John xiv. 18).

V. Practical submission to God's will is the truest safety (ver. 11, 12). From weakness within and trials without, we are in constant danger of going astray (Jer. x. 23). In dealing with Absalom, David felt that he might err on the side of mildness or of severity. So at other times. God's way is always the best way. Here it is described, commanded, and sought after. It is *right*: "Thy way." It is *pleasant*: "Plain path." It is *safe*. Here it is not the *will* of the ungodly, but the holy, loving will of God that is regnant (ver. 12).

VI. Encouraging self-admonition to hope in God for ever (ver. 13, 14). The psalmist communes with himself. The words are the broken utterance of deep feeling (*cf.* Gen. xxxi. 42; Exod. xxxii. 32). Here we see the weakness of the

soul. "I had fainted." Whenever we lose sight of "the goodness of the Lord," we grow weak. Faith, hope, and love, are ready to fail. *The strength of the soul*. "Unless I had believed,"—"a cordial made up of three sovereign ingredients—a hope to see, and to see the goodness of God; and the goodness of God in the land of the living."—*Sir R. Baker*. "Look unto me and be ye saved." Inspired with new courage, the believer consecrates himself afresh to God. "There is no more dignified species of worship to be found than that of exemplifying our faith in the omnipotence and wisdom of God, by humble and joyous perseverance under the greatest difficulties."—*Tholuck*. The great lesson of the psalm comes out at the close, "Wait, I say, on the Lord."

"Devote yourself to God, and you will find God fights the battles of a will resigned; Love Jesus! love will no base fear endure, Love Jesus! and of conquest rest secure."
—BISHOP KERR.

PSALM XXVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Hitzig and others have assigned this psalm to Jeremiah, but there does not seem to be any sufficient reason for questioning the traditional title which gives it to David. It may have been composed before he became king in Jerusalem, or at the time of Absalom's rebellion. It consists of two divisions. After earnestly entreating audience (ver. 1, 2), the psalmist prays that he may not be confounded with the wicked in their just punishment (vers. 3-5). He then gives thanks for anticipated deliverance, and ends with a catholic prayer for the blessing of God upon all His people (vers. 6-9). There are points of resemblance between this psalm and the two preceding.

THE INSTINCTS OF THE HEART.

This psalm may be held to express the deepest feelings of the heart.

I. The sense of dependence upon God (ver. 1). This "cry" is common. It expresses dependence. It is founded on the relation of the soul to God. The creature cries to the Creator, the subject cries to the sovereign, the sinner cries to the Saviour. In want and peril; when burdened with sorrow, and when bowed to the dust under the sense of sin and the fear of death, the soul instinctively turns to God for relief.

"My Rock" (*cf.* Ps. xviii. 2, xxxi. 2, xlii. 9). There is everything in God to

meet the needs of His people. If they are weak, with Him is everlasting strength. If all things "under the sun" are liable to change, He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." How sweet it is to say unto God "*my Rock*." This gives confidence in life and in death. Said a dying saint (the Rev. John Rees), "Christ in His person, Christ in the love of His heart, and Christ in the power of His arm, is the rock on which I rest; and now" (reclining his head gently on the pillow), "Death, strike."

II. Craving for fellowship with God.

The more we love a friend, the more strongly we seek his presence, and the more deeply do we deplore his estrangement and silence.

Here, 1. God's *silence is deprecated as the greatest evil*. Many feel no concern whether their prayers are heard or not. Mere formalists. Not so the psalmist. For God to be silent to him, was terrible. It left him without resource and hope; it seemed the closing in upon him of the "blackness of darkness," of the grave or of hell. He shrinks from such a doom, as an unspeakable horror. Hence his passionate cry, "Be not silent to me," &c. ("the pit" cf. Ps. xxii. 29, xxx. 3, Isa. xiv. 19, Ezek. xxvi. 20). 2. *God's fellowship sought as the greatest good* (ver. 2). *Humbly*. The lifting up of the hands is the symbolism of prayer (Ex. ix. 29, 1 Kings viii. 22). It expresses the desire of the humble, the reaching forth of the heart to God. *Earnestly*. "The earnestness of the cry is to be measured, not only by the greatness of the peril which is threatened, but by the faith which cleaves to God, knowing that in Him only is there help."—*Perowne*. "When I cry," that is now, at once, while I am speaking. *Importunately*. It is a matter of life and death. "Supplications." This word, being in the plural, shows the persistence and constancy of the good in prayer. *Through faith in the mercy of God*. "Holy Oracle," "This is the Holy of Holies, where the mercy-seat stood;" for the "Oracle" is, in Hebrew, the spot where Jehovah spoke to men, referring probably to His promise in Exodus xxv. 22, "There will I meet thee, and commune with thee."—*Bonar*. "To this, as the depositary of the ark and the earthly residence of God, the ancient saints looked, as we look now to Christ, in whom the idea of the Mosaic sanctuary has been realised."—*Alexander*. "We stretch out empty hands, for we are beggars; we lift them up, for we seek heavenly supplies; we lift them towards the mercy-seat of Jesus, for there our expectation dwells."—*Spurgeon*. God's fellowship is the life and joy of the soul. We want, not so much what He gives, as Himself.

III. Confidence in the eternal justice

of God. This world is not left to chance, or blind fate, or mere arbitrary will. It is governed by a power that maketh for righteousness. This has been the faith of the good in all ages.

"If this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."—*Milton*.

Hence, there is room for prayer (vers. 3-5). First, *deliverance is sought from the doom of the wicked*. "Draw me not away," i.e., to destruction with them (Ex. xxxii. 20; Job. xxiv. 22; Ps. xxvi. 9). "The wicked, the workers of iniquity, and the deceivers, are three terms for the unrighteous, referring to the heart, the hand, and the tongue."—*Murphy*. The good man shrinks from such company. He appeals confidently to God, not to confound the just with the unjust. Next, *Retribution is craved* (ver. 4). This implies their obstinate impenitency. Reason, conscience, and revelation proclaim that for such there can be no escape. There may be delay, there may be seeming inequality and failure, but retribution must come in the end, to the uttermost. The faith of the psalmist rises to prophetic certainty. There is nothing of mere human passion and animosity. "The reason why God's judgments should overtake the wicked, is not their malice against the psalmist, but their disregard of the Most High."—*Perowne*.

IV. *Gratitude for the Goodness of God*. Prayer leads to praise. The full heart bursts into song. "Blessed be the Lord!" For *answered prayers* (ver. 6). Perhaps the very thing asked was granted, or something better given instead. Answered prayers demand acknowledgment. For *assistance in time of need* (ver. 7). "My strength," internal. "My shield," external. The former includes all needful grace to enlighten, renew, and sanctify. The latter implies help and defence against every foe. How complete is the security of the people of God!

For *assurance of hope*. "The certainty that prayer is heard anticipates visible fulfilment."—*Perowne*. "My heart trusteth in Him." This flows

from the "strength," and wins the "shield." Twice over he says "my heart," not only showing the sincerity, but the strength and intensity of his gratitude. "With (lit. 'out of') my song," the song being, as it were, the source and the occasion of his praise (Ps. xxii. 25). "He who enjoys aught without thanksgiving, is as though he robbed God."—*Talmud*.

V. Exulting Joy in the Saving Strength of God (ver. 8). Every believer is, like Paul, "a pattern." What God does for one, He is able to do for all. The attention is fixed upon Him as an Almighty and All-Merciful Saviour. "The Lord is their strength," i.e., of yonder ones, of such as possess the character already described (cf. Ps. cxix. 9–11, Isa. xxxiii. 2).

"He is the saving strength of His anointed." "First the people, then Himself their monarch, but not David the man, but David the king as anointed of God, and chosen to feed His people."—*Perowne*. Strength that is rightly used, to help and not to oppress, to save and not to destroy, commands admiration. Here is the glory of the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation. Christ came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king."

VI. Trust in the ultimate triumph and blessedness of God's people (ver. 9). "It is impossible not to see, in these tender loving words, 'feed them, and bear them,' the heart of the Shepherd-King. Feed them, O Thou true Shepherd of Israel (Ps. lxxx. 1); bear them, carry them in Thine arms (Isa. lxiii. 9, xl. 11). Perhaps the reference may be to Deut. i. 31, xxxii. 11."—*Perowne*.

Mark, as to the good. 1. *Their character*. "Thy people."

2. *Their privilege*. "Thine inheritance" (Deut. iv. 20; Eph. i. 16).

3. *Their destiny*. "Save" from sin. "Bless" with the fruits of righteousness. "Feed" with the bread of life. "Lift" with the arm of the Lord to the dignity and blessedness of heaven. This prayer breathes throughout the most *Catholic spirit*. It is akin to that of Paul (Eph. iii. 14–19).

This prayer expresses also the most *delightful confidence*. It looks to the future with hope. It sees a good time coming, and is glad, with foretaste of the joy. What an inspiration to all who pray and work.

"Ah! when shall all men's good
Be each man's rule, and universal peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land,
And like a lane of beams athwart the sea,
Thro' all the circle of the golden year."

—*Tennyson*.

PSALM XXIX.*

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm is a magnificent description of a thunder-storm. Its mighty march from north to south, the desolation and terror which it causes, the peal of thunder, the flash of the lightning, even the gathering fury and lull of the elements, are vividly depicted. The psalm consists of five parts: a prelude, the body of the poem in three divisions, and a conclusion. The structure ('first fully explained by Ewald') of the whole is highly artificial, and elaborated with a symmetry of which no more perfect specimen exists in Hebrew. But this evidently artificial mode of composition is no check to the force and fire of the poet's genius, which kindles and glows, and sweeps along with all the freedom and majesty of the storm; the whole psalm being one continued strain of triumphant exultation. I. In the prelude, the singer lifts our thoughts at once from earth to heaven, by calling on the angels, who stand around the throne of God, to praise Him who manifests His glory in the thunder and lightning which He sends upon the earth (vers. 1, 2). II. Then follows the description of the storm in the three

* NOTE.—Thunder is extremely rare in Palestine during summer. Hence the miracle wrought by Samuel at the time of wheat-harvest must have made the greater impression on the people (1 Sam. xii. 17, 18). Thunder is called "the voice of God" (cf. Job xxxvii. 2; xl. 9,

Ps. xviii. 13, Isa. xxx. 31). It is the symbol of the Divine power and vengeance (1 Sam. ii. 10; vii. 10; 2 Sam. xxii. 14; Ex. ix. 28). On occasions when God has specially intimated His presence, there have been accompaniments of thunder (cf. Sinai, Ex. xix. 16, and Heb.

strophes which constitute the main body of the poem. These are so constructed, that the first (vers. 3, 4) gives us the beginning of the storm, the low, faint muttering thunder in the distant heavens; the next (ver. 5-7) describes the storm at its height, when it crashes the cedars and shakes the mountains; the last (vers. 8, 9) tells how it passes on over the plain-country to the forest of Kadesh, where it dies away. III. The conclusion consists, like the prelude, of two verses, each of two members. And here we are beautifully reminded that Jehovah, whom the angels praise, and who both *rules* and *stills* the elements in their wildest uproar, is the same Jehovah who gives *strength* and *peace* to His people" (vers. 10, 11).—*Perowne*.

(Verses 1-11.)

If Psalm viii. should be read at night, when the sky is bright with stars, and Psalm xix. by day, when the sun is high in the heavens, this ought to be studied during the gloom of the tempest, when the thunder rolls, and the lightnings flash, and the terrors of the Lord are on every side. It is then we can best realise its grandeur and beauty, and feel its power to bring us nearer God (vers. 1, 2). First, the psalmist would raise us to the true stand-point, that side by side with the angels, "the godlike ones," "the sons of the mighty," and inspired like them with holy love and joy, we may sing Jehovah's praise :

"Give unto the Lord, ye sons of the mighty,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength;
Give unto the Lord the glory of His name,
Bow down to the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

"In the beauty of holiness." This is rendered in the margin of our Bibles, "In His glorious sanctuary," others translate, "in holy attire," "in the vestments of the sanctuary," "in the beautiful robes of the priesthood." True holiness is of the soul. All things outwardly beautiful are but types of the

beautiful in soul. The meaning seems to be that as in heaven, so on earth, God should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. Standing with the psalmist, as it were, on the heights of Zion, let us watch the tempest, and let our hearts answer as he calls us.

I. To hear the voice of God in the thunder-storm (ver. 3). "The voice of the Lord." This was heard in the garden (Gen. iii. 8) calling Adam; on Mount Sinai (Deut. iv. 12, v. 22) proclaiming the ten commandments; by the prophets (Isa. vi. 8, Jer. xxvi. 13) announcing the invitations and warnings of the gospel; and in the thunderings with which the mountains tremble (1 Sam. vii. 10). The inspired writers see a unity in things, and discern the voice of God in the sounds of inanimate nature, as well as in the articulate words of human speech. In the present passage, the voice of the thunder is mentioned seven times (Rev. x. 3), which points to its sacred nature, and heavenly source.—*Murphy*. Reason and revelation agree in their teachings. The cold scientist may see nothing in the thunder-storm but law and force, and

xii. 18-24, also John xii. 29, and Rev. iv. 5, viii. 5, &c.). The poets of all lands make frequent reference to the thunder. There is a magnificent description of a thunder-storm in Job xxxvi. 27-xxxvii. 1-5, which may be compared with that in this psalm. Æschylus, Virgil, and Lucretius (book vi.) among the ancients, and Milton, Klopstock, and others among the moderns, have passages of great sublimity and beauty, describing thunderstorms. The following extracts are from Æschylus and Milton :

"I feel in very deed
The firm earth rock; the thunder's deepening
 roar
Rolls with redoubled rage; the bickering
 flames
Flash thick; the eddying sands are whirl'd
 on high;
In dreadful opposition, the wild winds

Rend the vexed air; the boisterous billows
 rise,
Confounding earth and sky, the impetuous
 storm
Rolls all its terrible fury."—*Trans. by Potter*.

"Either tropic now
'Gan thunder, and both ends of heaven, the
 clouds
From many a horrid rift abortive pour'd
Fierce rain, with lightning mix'd, water with
 fire,
In ruin reconcil'd; nor slept the winds
Within their stony caves, but rush'd abroad
From the four hinges of the world, and fell
On the vex'd wilderness, whose tallest pines,
Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest oaks,
Bow'd their stiff necks, laden with stormy
 blasts,
Or torn up sheer."

—*Paradise Regained*, book iv.

the trembling savage may behold only a dreadful power which he cannot comprehend ; but the Hebrew poet teaches us to recognise the presence and working of Jehovah. What is *law*, but His will ; what is *force*, but His strength ; what are all the phenomena of nature, but manifestations of His glory. A voice implies a speaker, and interprets to us his thought. Nature is to us the voice of God, and interprets to us His thoughts. We should think of Him as present not only representatively or influentially, but personally, and speaking to us, as truly by His works, as by His Word.

II. To adore the glory of God in the thunder-storm (vers. 3-9). Realising the presence of God, we are called to behold His strength and glory as reflected in the tempest. The description, though artificial, is in the highest degree vivid and powerful.

"i. In the first strophe, we hear the first yet distant sound of the thunder in the words, 'The voice of Jehovah is upon the waters.' In the next two clauses, 'The God of glory thundereth : Jehovah is upon many waters,' the long, loud peal grows more distinct ; whilst in ver. 4., again, it is pitched in a lower key, as if telling us of a pause in the storm.

"ii. In the next strophe, we have again (a) first, the renewed fury of the tempest, as coming nearer yet, it falls on the glory of Lebanon, and breaks her cedars in its might. 'The voice of Jehovah breaketh the cedars,' &c. (b) Next, gathering, with a wilder intensity of wrath, it bursts upon the mountain peaks, roaring amid their rocks, and shattering them ; and making the everlasting hills themselves to tremble as if with the throes of an earthquake, so that 'Lebanon and Sirion skip like young buffaloes.' (c) Lastly, we hear it sinking down in the line which describes the flashing of the forked lightning : 'The voice of Jehovah cleaveth the flames of fire' (vers. 5-7).

"iii. Again, the same structure is observable. One long peal after another has rolled and reverberated along the sky, and now the storm, in its jubilant strength, sweeps the whole land from

north to south. (a) Again, it is up in its majesty : 'The voice of Jehovah maketh the wilderness to tremble.' (b) Again, its last fury is poured out upon the wilderness of Kadesh. The very hinds bow themselves in travail pangs, and the forest is torn open and laid bare, as the hurricane drives through it in its path. (c) And again, the tempest is stilled, but this time its voice is hushed and lost for ever in the music and songs of the heavenly host. 'In His temple, all that are therein cry Glory' (vers. 8, 9).—*Perowne*.

III. To confide in God as the Almighty ruler of the thunder-storm (vers. 10, 11). The tempest has fulfilled its mission. The air seems purer, and the sun shines with a more chastened radiance. In the sweet tranquillity of the scene, the psalmist speaks words of instruction and comfort. He would strengthen our faith and hope in God. 1. We are taught to confide in God as an *Almighty King*. "Sitteth" in the tranquillity of an upright and Almighty Judge. "Upon the flood," that overwhelmed the old world, and rises and surges for the final overthrow of the wicked in a deluge, not of water, but of fire (2 Pet. iii. 7-10). "Sitteth King," to defend the right and defeat the wrong. "For ever !" The dominion that "has no beginning, knows no end."—*Murphy*.

2. *As blessing His people with strength and peace*. "These are the two great blessings of salvation. 'His people,' who are born of God, receive from Him the inheritance of sons, and are for ever distinguished from that wicked world that rejects the offers of His grace, and reaps the vengeance of everlasting destruction."—*Murphy*. "Very beautiful is the conclusion of the psalm. If, in His heavenly temple above, all that are therein ascribe 'glory' to God, upon earth, too, He has manifested His glory. He sat as king when He sent the flood of water to destroy the earth. He sits now, and for ever will sit, as king. As then He saved the righteous man from death, so now He watches over His people, for Jehovah is the God of Israel. It was He who, when the storm waxed

strong, gave it its strength; it was He who, when it was hushed, spread over earth, and sea, and sky, the sweet Sabbath stillness of peace. And He whose almighty power was seen in the march of the tempest, whose voice was heard in its wildest uproar, and whose word stilled its fiercest war, shall He

not give both strength and peace? Yea, Jehovah, who is strong and mighty, will give His own strength to His people. And He who is the Prince of Peace, will bless His people with peace. Thus the psalm begins, as Delitzsch says, with a *gloria in excelsis*, and ends with a *pax in torris*.—*Perowne*.

NATURE GOD'S TEMPLE.

I. Built by His hand (ver. 9). "I asked the earth, and it said, 'I am not He,' and all that is upon it made the same confession. I asked the sun, and the depths, and the creeping things that have life, and they answered, 'We are not thy God; look thou above us.' I asked the breezes and the gales; and the whole air with its inhabitants said to me, 'Anaximenes is in error, I am not God.' I asked the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, 'We too,' said they, 'are not the God whom thou seekest.' And I said to all the creatures that surround the doors of my fleshly senses, 'Ye have said to me, of my God, that ye are not He; tell me somewhat of Him.' And with a great voice, they exclaimed, '*He made us.*'"—*Augustine* (Conf. 10, 6). "Every house is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God" (Heb. iii. 4).

II. Hallowed by His presence. Nature is not an empty framework—a house without an inhabitant—a temple without a God. "I had rather believe all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind."—*Bacon*. God is everywhere, and to the eye of faith He is ever revealing more and more of His glory. "How precious are Thy thoughts to me, O Lord" (Ps.

cxxxix. 17). He who cannot find God in His works, is likely to miss Him in His Word. He who does not regard earth as sacred, is in danger of treating heaven as profane.

"The men,
Whom nature's works can charm, with God
Himself
Hold converse; grow familiar day by day
With his conceptions; act upon His plan,
And form to His, the relish of their souls."

III. Consecrated to His worship (ver. 9). This implies worshippers. Though nature reveals God, what boots it, if there were none to "speak of His glory." The devout soul turns to nature as to a temple.

"To that cathedral, boundless as our wonder,
Whose quenchless lamps, the sun and moon
supply;
Its choir the winds and waves, its organ
thunder,

Its dome, the sky.
There amid solitude and shade I wander
Through the green aisles; and stretched upon
the sod,
Awed by the silence, reverently ponder
The ways of God."

LEARN :

1. The sanctity of nature.
2. The holy uses of nature.
3. The subordination of nature to Christ.

"Read nature, nature is a friend to truth,
Nature is Christian, preaches to mankind,
And bids dead matter aid us in our Creed."
—*Young*.

PSALM XXX.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm was composed after recovery from a sickness which had very nearly proved fatal. The singer begins with an inscription of praise to God for His great goodness, and calls upon all who, like himself, had known the loving-kindness of Jehovah, to join him in his thanksgiving. Thence he passes (ver. 6.) to a recital of his own experience, his pleading with God in his affliction, and God's answer to his prayer. According to the inscription, the psalm was composed "at the dedication of the house." But what house? Some would understand the dedication of the spot on which the Temple afterwards stood, and which David purchased of Araunah (2 Sam. xiv.; 1 Chron. xxi). Others conjecture that by "the dedication of the house,"

is meant a purification and reconsecration of David's palace which Absalom had defiled (2 Sam. xx. 3). But, perhaps, if the inscription be trustworthy, it refers to the house which David built in his new city of Zion, and the building of which he seems to have regarded as a pledge of the security and prosperity of his kingdom (2 Sam. v. 11, 12). We must, however, still suppose that he had suffered just before from a sickness, about which the history is silent."—*Perowne*.

THOUGHTS ON RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

I God's hand in sending sickness (vers. 1-5). Sickness is common. No house is exempt, no age safe from its ravages. Sooner or later, it comes to all. But we err, if we think it a chance, or the result of mere second causes. The psalmist saw in it the *hand of God*. "*Thou hast lifted me up*" (as a bucket from a well, Ex. ii. 16, 19). How changed is sickness, when we recognise that it is sent of God. He does not act from caprice or passion. There is a "need be" (1 Pet. i. 6). It is in love, and for our good, that He afflicts. As Jesus took the blind man whom He was about to heal "aside from the multitude" (Mark vii. 33), so He takes His people, in sickness, aside from the din and bustle of the world, that in quietness and in solitude, He may speak to their hearts.

II. God's mercy in alleviating sickness (ver. 1). David felt that his case might have been far worse. As we learn from 1 Chron. xxi. 12, he was offered his choice of three evils,—war, famine, or pestilence. He shrank from the first. His brave heart could not bear the shame of being driven before his foes. In his strait he left the decision with God. "Let me fall now into the hands of the Lord, for very great are His mercies." Nor was he disappointed. Though cast down, he was not cast off; though visited with sore affliction, "God had not made his enemies to rejoice over him." There are *alleviations* in every sickness. In wrath God remembers mercy. There is *restraining mercy*. "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of His east wind" (Isa. xxvii. 8; cf. Ezra ix. 13; Mal. iii. 17. There is *upholding mercy*. Not only is life spared, and the grave deprived of its prey, but inward strength is given. Faith is confirmed; foes who watched for falls and prophesied evil are disappointed. There is *comforting mercy*.

Books are a great help; the love of friends is a great solace. How different to be watched by the kind eyes, and to be ministered to by the gentle hands of those who love us, than to pine in solitude, or to be waited upon by strangers and hirelings! But, above all, there are the *comforts of religion*. Baxter said, "I have pain, there is no use arguing against sense; but I have peace, *I have peace!*" Samuel Rutherford said of Jesus, "His sweet presence eateth out the bitterness of sorrow."

III. God's loving kindness in restoring from sickness. There are many who have no sense of God's mercies. They may have stirrings of heart and relentings so long as sickness lasts, but when it is over they go back to their old ways; they are little, if at all, altered for the better by what they have gone through. God is not in all their thoughts. But it is different with true believers. Their grateful cry is, "*Thou hast healed me*" (vers. 2, 3). Here recovery from sickness is represented—
1. As granted *in answer to prayer*. Mark the earnestness and faith of the suppliant. He cries to God as a child to his father. He takes hold of God's strength, and pleads with Him as his covenant God. "*O Lord my God.*" Happy sickness that drives the soul to Jesus!

2. As effected by *sovereign love* (ver. 3). It was the Lord's doing. Thrice does David say, "*Thou hast.*" And it was all of grace, and not for any deserving on his part. This thought awakens the liveliest gratitude (Ps. cxvi. 1).

3. As *designed for the holiest ends* (vers. 4, 5). If he had been brought back, as from the brink of the grave, and his strength restored, it was that he might consecrate himself anew to God, and serve Him with greater love and steadfastness (Ps. cxix. 67): "*Be-*

fore I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy word" (*cf.* Isa. xxxviii. 17-19; Heb. xii. 7-11; 1 Pet. v. 10).

Jeremy Taylor says that "God who in mercy and wisdom governs the world, would never have suffered so

many sadnesses, and have sent them especially to the most virtuous and the wisest men, but that He intends they should be the seminary of thought, the nursery of virtue, the exercise of wisdom, the trial of patience, the venturing for a crown, and the gate of glory."

A SONG TO THE LORD.

(Verses 4, 5.)

I. The Singers. "Ye saints of His." "Beloved," more literally, "who have obtained mercy of Him."—*Perowne*. "His gracious ones."—*Alexander*. "His pious ones."—*Murphy*. "David would not fill his choir with reprobates, but with sanctified persons who could sing from their hearts. He calls to you, ye people of God, because ye are saints; and if sinners are wickedly silent, let your holiness constrain you to sing. You are *His* saints, chosen, blood-bought, called, and set apart for God, sanctified on purpose that you should offer the daily sacrifice of praise."—*Spurgeon*.

II. The Song. *Consider*:—1. *The Theme* (ver. 4). "His holiness." "His holy name," literally, "His holy memorial," with reference, no doubt, to the passage in Ex. iii. 15: "This is My name for ever, and this is My memorial to all generations." "God's name is His revelation of Himself in all His various attributes of love, wisdom, power, holiness, truth, and righteousness. God's memorial is that great history of redemption which was, so to speak, the setting up of a monument to His glory, on which all these attributes were inscribed."—*Perowne*.

2. *The Spirit. Devoutness.* "Unto the Lord." *Sociality.* "Ye saints." *Gratitude.* "Give thanks." Gratitude is a free and joyous affection. It has been well called the memory of the heart.

"'Holy, holy, holy!' is the song of seraphim and cherubim; let us join it, not dolefully, as though we trembled at the holiness of God, but cheerfully, as humbly rejoicing in it."—*Spurgeon*.

3. *The occasion* (ver. 5., *cf.* 1 Chron. xxi. 15). The plague that followed the sin of numbering the people had brought David very low, but the voice that said "It is enough," lifted him and his up again. The night of death, like that of Egypt, had filled the land with weeping, but the morning of mercy ushered in a day of gratitude and joy for the forgiven king and his people (ver. 5). "A reason why God's saints should praise Him, because He manifests Himself to them in love, not in wrath, or if in wrath, but for a moment. Love rules over all. The literal rendering of the verse is: 'For, in His anger is (but) a moment, in His favour a life; in the evening, weeping may come in to pass the night; but with the morning (there is) a shout of joy.' The parallelism is carefully preserved in each member, 'anger, favour;' 'a moment, a life;' 'evening, morning;' 'weeping, joy.' We must not repeat the verb 'pass the night' with the second clause. Weeping is described in the first under the image of a wayfarer who comes in at evening to lodge for the night. The suddenness and surprise of gladness, on the other hand, in the morning, are beautifully represented by the simple לִבְקֹר דָּפָה, 'at dawn, a shout of joy,' without a verb. Just as the sun in Eastern lands, without any long prelude of twilight to announce his coming, leaps in, as it were, in a moment, above the horizon, so does the light of God's love dispel in a moment the long night and darkness of sorrow. See the beautiful parallel (Isa. liv. 7, 8)."—*Perowne*.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF LIFE.

(Verses 6-12.)

I. Prosperity and presumption (ver. 6). The pronoun is emphatic. "And as for me." "There is a tacit opposition between the psalmist's present and his former experience. Now he had learnt through the lesson of suffering to trust in God. Before that suffering came, he had begun to trust in himself. 'I seemed so strong, so secure, I began to think within myself, I shall never be moved.'" —*Perowne*. "Prosperity,—the Hebrew word includes the idea of prosperity, and of that self-confidence which it produces." —*Alexander* (cf. Deut. viii. 11-18, xxxii. 15, Hos. xiii. 6, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25). In itself "prosperity" is not evil but good. It is promised to the righteous (Ps. i. 3). It is a token of God's favour (Gen. xxvi. 12, 13). But it needs much faith and humility to prevent its becoming a snare. It often leads to pride, self-indulgence, and forgetfulness of God. Thus what is good is perverted to bad uses.

"In prosperity conscience is a pope that gives dispensations to the heart." —*Samuel Rutherford*.

"When men are made spiritually faint by dealing in and with the world, Satan sets on them, as Amalek did on the faint and weak of the people that came out of Egypt." —*Owen*.

"Little knows
Any, but God alone, to value right
The good before him, but *perverts* best things
To worst alone, or to their meanest use."

—*Milton*.

II. Presumption and chastisement (ver. 7). God's love is shown in divers ways. He treats His children according to their special requirements, but His ends are ever the same. Prosperity, when it leads to presumption, is a sore evil. It needs sharp treatment. Speaking is not enough (Jer. xxii. 2). Another method must be adopted. "Thou didst hide Thy face." There is no greater affliction than this. The loss of health and prosperity is bad, the estrangement of friends is worse, but the withdrawal of God, as if in anger, is worst of all. The light of God's face is salvation (Ps.

xliv. 3). Zion's strength was nothing; all the glory of Israel was gone if God departed. No wonder the psalmist says "I was troubled," "agitated," "terrified," "perplexed." —*Alexander*.

Let us thank God for chastisement. It is for our good. We presume upon our health, and God sends sickness. We presume upon our friends, and God takes them from us. We presume upon our reputation and worldly goods, and God lets us be put to shame. We presume upon our frames and feelings in religion, and God suffers us to be tried with doubts and to walk in darkness. So in many ways, God teaches us humility, and shuts us up to Himself as the supreme and abiding good.

"Certainly virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed: for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." —*Bacon*.

III. Chastisement and prayer (vers. 8-10). "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." The two things are naturally connected.

Consider David's prayer. 1. It is earnest (ver. 8). "I cried unto the Lord." His whole soul went out in a cry (cf. 1 Chron. xxi. 16, 17).

2. It is argumentative (ver. 9). Like Job, he reasons with the Almighty (Job xxiii. 4, cf. Isa. xxxiii. 18, 19). "What profit is in my blood;" in my death. "Shall the dust praise Thee?" "To thank God for His mercy, and to show the truth of His grace, form the chief end for which He leaves His people here for a season. The dust cannot do this, and the spirit is not here." —*Murphy*.

3. It is disinterested. He does not seek prolonged life for his own sake, but in order to serve and praise God. He felt that his life would be more useful than his death (cf. Phil. i. 23-25).

It is a blessed thing when chastisement thus leads the soul to cast itself on God, and to acquiesce in His will.

"Nearer my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me."

IV. Prayer and deliverance (ver. 11). His prayer has been answered. Here he acknowledges the greatness of his deliverance.

1. *It was the Lord's doing.* "Thou hast," &c. "Turned" (cf. John xvi. 20), not "exchanged for," but "*turned into.*"

2. *It was complete.* "Beating the breast was a token of mourning. Dancing was an expression of pious joy (2 Sam. vi. 14). So sackcloth was the garb of mourning (1 Chron. xxi. 16). 'Girded me with gladness.' New garments are the wonted symbol of salvation" (Isa. lxi. 3).—*Murphy.* "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. l. 15).

V. Deliverance and praise (ver. 12).

"The sackcloth of his humiliation God had taken away off him, and had clothed him with the garment of praise. How should he do otherwise than praise God for ever for His goodness."—*Perowne.* "To the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee." The soul is the noblest part, the glory of man, and God's deliverances are worthy of the highest efforts of the soul, in gratitude and praise. How often have God's saints realised the truth of all these things in their experience (Ps. ciii. 3, cxvi. 1). When we bow our hearts to God as our Father in Heaven, and say Thy will be done, we can confidently end with the triumphant song "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever."

PSALM XXXI.

INTRODUCTION.

A psalm, in which the psalmist rises by prayer, from trouble, to lively faith and hope in God. The older interpreters founding on the use of the same word in vers. 2, 3 (Heb.), and 1 Sam. xxiii. 25, for the most part, refer the psalm to the time when David fled from Saul into the wilderness of Maon. Ewald, Hitzig, and others attribute it to Jeremiah, chiefly because of its plaintive character, and from the fact that certain expressions found in this psalm are also found in Jeremiah (cf. ver. 14. and Jer. xx. 10, and the recurrence of the phrase "Fear on every side," Jer. vi. 25, xx. 3, xlv. 5, xlix. 29, Lam. ii. 22). As to this, Tholuck says, "That the prophets used the psalms, and not the psalmist the prophets, may be inferred from the fondness of Jeremiah to weave the sayings of the ancients into his compositions (cf. Ps. i. 3, xxxiii. 7). Perowne says, "On other grounds there is no reason why the psalm should not be David's. It breathes throughout his rare tenderness of spirit, as well as his faith and courage. The figures of the stronghold and the rock so often repeated (vers. 2-4), are most suitable in his mouth (cf. Ps. xviii.), and so are the expressions in ver. 8 and in ver. 21."

PRAYER THE RESOURCE OF THE GODLY IN AFFLICTION.

(Verses 1-8.)

This prayer:

I. Springs from trust in God (vers. 1-3). 1. *The Almighty Father.* This is the character in which God has revealed Himself. He is infinitely just, and holy, and merciful. His people are His children. All of them are dear to Him, but the weak and the sorrowful are the special objects of His care. As a father watches his sick child, and bends to listen to his feeblest cry, so "our Father in heaven" bows down in pitying mercy to His people when they are in trouble. 2. *The everlasting refuge* (ver. 1). "In Thee have I found refuge."—*Perowne.*

Various figures are employed to set forth the strength and impregnableness of this refuge (ver. 2), "Strong Rock," "House of Defence" (ver. 3). "My rock and my fortress" (cf. Ps. xviii. 2). The fitness and force of these images must have been deeply felt by David, who had so often found safety from his enemies in the caves and fastnesses of the rocks. "The psalmist grounds his prayer on the fact that the Lord is in reality his rock and his fortress, because he knew Him as such by the faith which God never puts to shame."—*Hengstenberg.* "The psalmist prays 'Be thou to me,'

or rather, 'Become to me, prove Thyself to be my rock and house of defence; for I know that Thou, and Thou only, art my refuge.' This is the logic of the heart, if not of the intellect; the logic, it may be added, of every prayer of faith."
—*Perowne*.

II. Implores the highest blessings.

1. *Vindication of his hope* (ver. 1). "Shamed," i.e., utterly confounded, disappointed and frustrated in his hopes" (Ps. vi. 11, xxii. 5, xxv. 2, 20).—*Alexander*. Such a fate would be terrible. It would be dishonourable to God, as well as to His servant. But God will never suffer those who trust in Him to be put to confusion. 2. *Deliverance in righteousness* (ver. 2). "In Thy righteousness set me at liberty."—*Perowne*. He longed for freedom; but he would not seek even such a boon, save in a way that was for the glory of God. "God is a just God and a Saviour." 3. *Guidance in the way of holiness* (ver. 3. cf. Ps. xxiii. 2, 3). "The double word indicates an urgent need—we require double direction, for we are fools, and the way is rough. Lead me as a soldier, guide me as a traveller! Lead me as a babe, guide me as a man; lead me by Thy hand, guide me by Thy Word. The argument used is one which is fetched from the armoury of free grace; not for my own sake, but for Thy name's sake, guide me."—*C. H. Spurgeon*. 4. *Protection to the end of life* (vers. 4, 5). The "net" refers to the craft and malice of enemies. There are dangers known and unknown, there are foes who face us openly, and there are foes who plot and work in secret. Our daily prayers should be, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

III. Characterised by the noblest emotions.

1. *Humility*. "Bow down." 2. *Earnestness*. "Speedily." 3. *Aspira-*

tion. "Be Thou my strong rock." 4. *Zeal for God's glory*. "For Thy name's sake." 5. *Self-surrender*. "Into Thy hand I commend my spirit." "My spirit (*ruach*) more than my soul or life (*Nephesh*). It is not only from sickness and death, but from sin and all ghostly enemies, that the man of God should be kept, and therefore he commends to God, not his body or his bodily life alone, but the life of his spirit, which is more precious" (cf. Is. xxxviii. 16).—*Perowne*. 6. *Unbounded trust*. "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Past deliverances are strong supports of faith. What the Lord was, He is; what He has done, He is able to do again, yea, and much more, exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. He is the mighty one who is ever true to Himself and to His word. The gods of the heathen are "lying vanities," but Jehovah is worthy of the highest trust.

IV. Followed by the grandest deliverance (cf. 1 Sam. xxiii. 1–11). The psalmist exults (vers. 7, 8) in the wondrous redemption wrought out by God. 1. *Sovereign mercy*. "I will be glad and rejoice in Thy mercy." 2. *Tender sympathy*. "Thou hast considered my trouble." There are different forms of consideration (cf. Job i. 8; Ps. xxxi. 7, xli. 1). 3. *Benign interposition* (ver. 8). 4. *Delightful freedom* (ver. 8, cf. Ps. iv. 1). "Though the mariner sees not the polestar, yet the needle of the compass which points to it tells him which way he sails. Thus the heart that is touched with the loadstone of divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God by fixed believing, interprets the fear by the love in the fear, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward—towards the haven of eternal rest."—*Leighton*.

THE GREAT DEPOSIT.

(Verse 5.)

"With these words, our Lord breathed out His life (Luke xxiii. 46), as He had before used words from another psalm in His agony on the cross. The first

words were from a psalm (xxii.) which, typically at least, foreshadowed His sufferings; whereas this is not in the same way predictive. But the Holy

One of God, in that last hour of mortal agony, chose these words of one of His servants to express the solemn surrender of His life. And, in so doing, He gave them a new interpretation. The Jewish singer only meant by them that he put himself and all his hopes into the hand of God. Jesus meant by them, that by *His own act, of His own free will*, He gave up His spirit, and therefore His life, to the Father. And they who have died with their Lord, have died with the same words on their lips. These were the last words of Polycarp, of Bernard, of Huss, of Jerome of Prague, of Luther, Me-

lancthon, and many others. 'Blessed are they,' says Luther, 'who die not only *for* the Lord, as martyrs,—not only *in* the Lord, as all believers,—but likewise *with* the Lord, as breathing forth their lives in these words, "Into Thy hand I commend my spirit."'" — *Perowne*.

I. The soul survives the shock of death.

II. The care of the soul is the supreme concern in death.

III. The well-being of the soul, in life and in death, consists in its dedication to Christ.

THE STORY OF A SUFFERER.

(Verses 9–18.)

I. **Mark the divine listener.** "O Lord" (Jehovah). Ten times does David use this name of hope. Who is like God, so kind, so patient, so sympathising? He has infinitely more pity than the most loving father (Ps. ciii. 13), infinitely more tenderness than the most faithful mother (Is. lxvi. 13, xlix. 15). The sorrows of countless millions are being poured into His ear, but He is never weary. He listens to the tale of the humblest child, as if he were the only object of His care.

"To Thee alone my sorrows shall appeal,
Hath earth a wound too hard for heaven to heal."—*Quarles*.

II. **Ponder the sad complaint.** Like Hezekiah (2 Kings xix. 4), the psalmist pours out his heart before the Lord. We seem to hear his sobs and cries. 1. *Consumed by grief* (vers. 9, 10). "Eye, soul, belly, the seats and means of intelligence, will, and power."—*Murphy*. Body and mind were alike exhausted. 2. *Depressed by conscious sin* (ver. 10). His eye turned within as well as without. His real trouble was in his sin. "*Mine iniquity*." It was his, his very own, for which he and he only was responsible. So it is; others may have tempted or taken part in the transgression, but so far as it is our act, it is *our* property. What a burden is sin! What a terrible plague is the

plague of a sinful heart. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

3. *Wounded by the cruel treatment of his contemporaries*. The reproach of foes was bad, the distrust of acquaintances was worse, but the alienation of friends was worst of all. He complains of the "slander of many." The tongues of not only Doeg, Nabal, and the Ziphites, but of many more, were let loose against him.

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny."

"Its edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath rides on the posting winds; and doth belie all corners of the world."—*Shakespeare*.

4. *Disheartened by the unrelenting malice of his enemies* (ver. 13). "Fear was on every side." Wherever he turned he met a foe. One fell purpose inspired them all. They were like the conspirators against Paul, "who bound themselves with an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him" (Acts xxiii. 21). Jeremiah, who was also a "man of sorrows," complains in the same words: "Fear was on every side" (Jer. xx. 10); and once and again he uses similar terms (Jer. vi. 25, xx. 3, 4, xlv. 5, xlix. 29; Lam. ii. 22).

5. *Utterly self-desponding*. The brightness of life was gone—his reputa-

tion and usefulness were ruined. He seemed good for nothing. Forsaken and forlorn, he was as a "dead man out of mind." But for his trust in God, all hope would be lost (*cf.* Ps. xliii).

III. Rejoice with the relieved sufferer (vers. 14–18). 1. *Filial trust in God* (ver. 14). "Mighty strength of faith when a man conscious of his own sinfulness (ver. 10), and with a world in arms against him, yea, forsaken of his own friends (ver. 11), can still turn to God and say, 'Thou art my God.'"—*Perowne*.

2. *Humble acquiescence in the Divine will* (ver. 15). "MY TIMES, *i.e.*, all my life, with its 'sundry and manifold changes,' its joys and sorrows, its hopes and conflicts, are not the sport of chance, or the creatures of a blind fate, but are

in Thy hand, 'O Thou living, personal Redeemer.'"—*Perowne*. Thus, to have faith in God's will and rule, is to enter into rest. "Providence is a soft pillow for anxious heads, an anodyne for care, a grave for despair."

3. *Confident hope of a happy issue to all his troubles* (vers. 16–18). His faith rises to certainty. He anticipates the time when the lips of lying should be struck dumb, when his enemies should be put to shame, or lie silent in the grave, and when he himself should rejoice in the sunshine of Jehovah's love (Num. vi. 25).

"Oh! there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our Friend."—*Wordsworth*.

BURIED ALIVE.

(Verse 12.)

Now and again accidents happen, such as the falling of earth and the closing up of mines, by which people are buried alive. There are also horrible tales of persons who, of design, have suffered this cruel fate. David speaks here of a sort of moral counterpart. Driven into exile, and cut off from the society of friends and the business of life, he soon came to be as if forgotten. He whose exploits had but lately been the theme of song, and whose name was on every lip, was now "as a dead man, out of mind." This has been the experience of many since, though the form of the calamity has varied. People may be buried alive—

I. By the malice of enemies. There may be such a persistent covering of their names, with lies and slander, that at last they are, like David, given up to "contemptuous oblivion." "Public envy is an ostracism."—*Bacon*.

II. By the neglect of contemporaries. "Out of sight, out of mind." After Butler had preached his famous sermons at the Rolls Chapel, he accepted a country charge, where he lived in great retirement. Years passed and he was forgotten. A friend spoke to the Queen

about him, and she answered that she thought he was dead, and appealed to Archbishop Blackburne if it were not so. His reply was, "No, madam, he is not dead, but *he is buried*." This is the way in which the world has treated many of its greatest men.

III. By the lack of opportunities for distinction. While every one has his chance, so to speak, some have better chances than others. Two persons may have equal merits, but one rises high, while the other remains to the last in the same humble position. There are latent talents that are never called forth,—minds of high power that are never developed. Gray sings of this in his "Elegy in a Country Churchyard":—

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have
sway'd,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre:
But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er un-
roll;
Chill penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul."

IV. By the failure of capacity for usefulness. Changes take place. Popularity may fade. Broken health or

misfortune may necessitate retirement. Men who once bulked large in the public eye are lost sight of and forgotten. Hence, when their death is published, it comes as a surprise. It is said, We thought they had been dead long ago. They had been virtually *buried alive* years before their death.

All these things prophesy of a hereafter. If we serve God truly, it matters little whether we have praise of men or not. Our record is on high. In heaven there will be a balm for every wound, and redress for every wrong, and many who are first shall be last, *and who are last shall be first.*

THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

(Verses 19-24.)

His well-grounded hope now brings triumphant certainty, and this breaks forth in glad acknowledgment of God's goodness to the righteous, and an exhortation to all to wait on Him in unshaken confidence of heart. "Oh! how great is Thy goodness."

David's exclamation leads us to consider the goodness of God—

I. As a spectacle of surpassing beauty. "How great!" Creation, providence, redemption, reveal God's goodness. More and more, in the course of the ages, it is unfolded, and calls forth wonder, love, and praise.

"My heart is awed within me, when I think
Of the great miracle that still goes on
In silence round me—the perpetual work
Of Thy creation, finish'd, yet renew'd
For ever."—*Bryant.*

"His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers,—his t' enjoy
With a propriety that none can feel;
But who with filial confidence, inspired,
Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling say, My Father made them all!
Are they not his by a peculiar right,
And by an emphasis of interest his,
Whose eyes they filled with tears of holy
joy,
Whose heart with praises, and whose ex-
alted mind
With worthy thoughts of that unwearied
love
That plann'd, and built, and still upholds a
world
So clothed with beauty for rebellious man."
—*Cowper.*

II. As a treasury of inexhaustible wealth. "*Thou hast laid up,*" lit. "hidden" (cf. xvii. 4, and "the hidden manna," Rev. ii. 17). "This is the love of God manifested to the soul in secret."

—*Perowne.* "Layest up." "This intimates that much of the Divine goodness was yet in store for him. This is true of all God's saints, if we include the unending future."—*Murphy.* God's goodness is partly seen, and partly unseen. What is seen, may, as it were, be measured; but what is unseen, is boundless. What is a river to the ocean! What is the landscape, that the eye can reach, to the vast unseen realms of the earth. What are the thousand stars that crowd the winter sky, to the millions upon millions that are hid in the depths of space! So with the goodness of God. The sons of Jacob carried away their "ass loads" of the finest of the wheat, but what were these to the stores laid up in Egypt's granaries. The Queen of Sheba's heart fainted when she saw the treasures of Solomon, for the half had not been told her of his wisdom and his wealth; but a greater than Solomon is here, whose riches are unsearchable, and whose wisdom is past finding out. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

III. As a work of infinite beneficence. "Oh! how great is Thy goodness, *which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee, before the sons of men.*" This refers to the open manifestation of goodness. "Goodness is laid up in the promise, wrought in the performance, and that goodness which is laid up, is wrought for them that trust in God; and thus, as God's faithfulness

engageth us to believe, so our faith, as it were, engageth God's faithfulness to perform the promise."—*N. Hardy*.

Scripture, observation, and memory, supply countless proofs of God's kindness. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

What God hath wrought is set forth in two divisions. 1. *General* (ver. 20). "Thou protectest them in the hiding-place of Thy presence from the factions of men."—*Delitzsch*. "The hiding-place of Thy presence, or 'of Thy countenance;' elsewhere of God's tabernacle (xxvii. 5); or of His wings (lxi. 5); or of His shadow (xci. 1). But this is the most striking figure of all: to be hidden in the light of God's face, hidden in that splendour where His power is hidden (Hab. iii. 4). What an image at once of safety and blessedness!"—*Pewee*.

2. *Particular* (ver. 21). David here speaks of himself. Probably the reference is to God's signal interposition in his behalf at Ziklag (*Delitzsch*).

(Ver. 22). "In my haste." "David and his people wept, till they had no more power to weep, for the burning of Ziklag and the capture of their wives and children (1 Sam. xxvii). 'I am cut off.' This was a fatal blow, apparently indicating the deep displeasure of God, and His final departure from him. 'Yet Thou heardest.' David at length encouraged himself in the Lord his God, who heard his cry, and restored to him all that he had lost."—*Murphy*.

"Through every period of my life,
Thy goodness I'll proclaim;
And after death, in distant worlds,
Resume the glorious theme."

TWO COUNSELS OF WISDOM.

Vers. 23, 24. David speaks here to all to whom God has been gracious.

I. Love the Lord. This is the first and great commandment, and finds an echo in every true heart.

Reason says "Love the Lord." Who is worthy of the heart but the Supremely Good? "We needs must love the highest, when we see it."—*Tennyson*.

Gratitude says "Love the Lord." Consider not only what God is in Himself, but what He has done for His people. "His saints." They are His favoured ones, loved, redeemed, and sanctified. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John iv. 19).

Experience says "Love the Lord." This is the voice that comes down from the pious of every land and age, back to the days of paradise. Nothing but good comes from loving God. The more we love Him, the higher we rise in dignity and strength. The more we love Him, the fitter we become for the duties and trials of earth, and the meeter for the inheritance of the saints in heaven. "Faith-keeping is Jehovah," alike as to His promises and His threatenings, alike in His retributive providence towards His people who trust in Him, and towards

the proud and the evil-doers, who reject His counsel and His love. "In His favour is life."

II. Be of good courage (ver. 24). There are differences as to courage. There is the courage of the *flesh*. This is common to us with the lower animals. See what Job says of the war-horse (Job xxxix. 19), and Solomon of the lion (Prov. xxx. 30). Most men when their blood is up will do what are called brave deeds.

There is the courage of the *mind*. This is higher. It implies resolution, firmness, a capacity to gird one's self for deeds of daring and difficulty.

But noblest of all, is the courage of the *soul*. This implies a heart that is right with God, and hence a heart that is loyal to truth and to duty, a heart that is continually being recruited with new strength, and that is ready for any fate. "Be of good courage," i.e., be brave, firmly reliant on God, "and He will strengthen your heart." "Be strong in purpose and desire, and He will make you strong in fact."—*Alexander*. "All ye that hope in the Lord." "The psalm ends as Psalm xxvii. Hope and waiting are marks peculiarly of the Old Testament dispensation. It is

true, even in the New, one apostle writes, 'we are saved by hope.' And another says, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be,' but he adds what no believer in the days of types and shadows could have said, 'We *know* that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Wonderful is the hopeful trust of the saints

of old in God, when we remember that they did not know Him as God manifested in the flesh."—*Perowne*.

"Love the Lord," "Be of good courage." These two counsels are intimately connected. Love and courage go together. What will not the mother dare for love of her child, and the patriot for the love of his country?

PSALM XXXII.

INTRODUCTION.

"This is the second of the seven penitential psalms, as they are called, which, says Selnecker, 'St. Augustine used often to read with weeping heart and eyes, and which before his death he had written on the wall over against his sick-bed, that he might exercise himself therein, and find comfort therein in his sickness.' St. Augustine's own words, '*Intelligentia prima, est ut te noris peccatorem*,' might stand as its motto. There can be little doubt that this psalm was composed after Nathan came to David. Psalm li. was the confession of his sin and the prayer for forgiveness. This psalm is the record of the confession made and the forgiveness obtained, and the conscious blessedness of his position as a son restored to his Father's house. There was a shelter for him there now,—'*Thou art my hiding-place*.' There was joy and gladness on his return,—'*Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance*.' And here he carries out the resolve of Psalm li. 'Then will I teach transgressors Thy way, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.' The instruction of the psalm may be summed up in the words of Prov. xxviii. 13, or in those of 1 John i. 8, 9."—*Perowne*.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE FORGIVEN.

(Verses 1-7.)

I. Declared as a doctrine (vers. 1, 2). We are taught here—1. That *sin is the real cause of all unhappiness*. As Milton grandly sings:

"Disproportioned sin
Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great God."

2. That the *removal of sin is the gracious act of God* (Ex. xxxiv. 7; Isa. xliii. 25; 1 John i. 8, 9). Ver. 1. *Manton* says that it is here as in law, when "many words of like import and significance are heaped up and put together to make the deed and legal instrument more complete and perfect." The group of words is the same as in Ex. xxxiv. 7 and Ps. li. 5, 6. Though dark, they show the better the brightness of God's love (Rom. iii. 20, 21). First, sin is branded as "*transgression*," i.e. revolt, open and daring defection from God's covenant

(Is. i. 2, xlii. 27; Jer. iii. 13; Amos iv. 4; cf. 1 Kings xii. 19). In this form sin is said to be forgiven, lit. "*taken away*." Like a burden, it is lifted off the soul. Like the sins laid on the scape-goat, it is carried away into the wilderness (cf. Lev. xvi. 21, John i. 29). Next, sin is described as "*a coming short of the mark*." Righteousness is the true end of man, and sin is the missing of that end. This is not from mere weakness, but is the result of moral obliquity and wilfulness. In this form, sin is said to be "*covered*." It is put out of sight, as by the blood sprinkled over the mercy-seat (Ex. xxv. 21; Lev. viii. 14, 15); and the sinner is treated as if he had not sinned (Ps. lxxxv. 2; Is. xxxviii. 17, xlv. 22; 1 John i. 7).

Lastly, sin is regarded as "*iniquity*," a twisting and perversion of the will from the right way,—wrong-doing which not only includes guilt but punishment.

In this aspect sin is said not to be reckoned. The best comment here is in the words of St. Paul (Rom. iv. 6) : "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness, without works, saying, '*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*'"

3. That the removal of sin is wrought by God in such a way as to secure the highest blessedness of man. "Oh! the blessings, oh! the happiness of the man!" Not only is guilt removed, but the heart is renewed. "No guile," no falseness, either to himself or to God. "The man whose *transgression* is forgiven, whose *sin* is hidden—God having cast it as a millstone into the depths of the sea,—whose *iniquity* and *perversion* is not reckoned to his account, and whose *guile*—the deceitful and desperately wicked heart—is annihilated, being emptied of sin, and filled with righteousness, is necessarily a happy man."—*Adam Clarke*. "What can be heavy to that man who is eased of the intolerable burden of sin? How animated was that saying of Luther, 'Smite, Lord, smite, for Thou hast absolved me from my sins!'"—*Leighton*.

II. Illustrated as a fact (vers. 3-5). David here speaks of himself. "He had long struggled with the sense of his sin, had long been crushed to the earth with his burden, because he would not humble himself before God; but God had given him again the heart of a child. He had gone to his Father with the penitent confession, 'I have sinned;' and, as in the parable, the Father's heart moved towards his prodigal son when he was yet a long way off, so David found that his Father was ready to forgive. 'I said, I will confess,' and 'Thou tookest away the guilt of my sin.'"—*Perowne*.

1. First picture. The misery of the man who criminally delays confession (vers. 3, 4). These striking words show that the misery was great. Body and soul suffered. The pain was exhausting, and compelled loud and passionate complaints. *Constant*. It lasted as long

as he kept silence. The struggle with conscience was fearful. Neither day nor night was there relief. It was as if the fires of hell were already kindled, consuming his strength, and drying up the springs of his being. *Irremediable*. There was no remedy, for the misery was caused by his own sin, and continued by his obstinate alienation from God. Every effort that he made to better himself, so long as he refused to humble his heart before God by confession, only aggravated his pain. The wrath of God abideth on the sinner till he flies to Christ. "Thy hand was heavy upon me." "That hand which when pressing is so heavy, when raising is so sweet and powerful (Ps. xxxvii. 24), and when scattering its blessings so full and so ample (Ps. civ. 28, cxlv. 16). He would not at first be humbled by the confession of his iniquity, and therefore he is humbled by the weight of the hand of God. Oh! powerful hand! beyond all comparison more grievous than any other hand to press down, and more powerful to raise up. He who suppresses his sins without confessing them,

'Conceals an inward wound, and burns with secret fire.'

Under the appearance of sparing, he is indeed cruel to himself. It may perhaps occasion more present pain to draw out the point of the weapon that sticks in the flesh, but to neglect it will occasion greater danger and more future torment."—*Leighton*.

2. Second picture. The blessedness of the man who frankly confesses his sins to God (ver. 5). Here is the end of the struggle—confession, and so forgiveness and peace.

Confession must be made to God. "Unto Thee." The sin is against Him. To Him we must answer. He only can forgive. We need neither priest nor angel to mediate. God Himself "*receiveth sinners.*"

Confession must be frank and full. "I acknowledge my sin." It is honourable to God and good for us that there should be a complete unburdening of the heart. There has been too much of extenuating, excusing, and hiding. Now,

nothing should be kept back. Sin is before the soul as it is before God. The hard, sullen "keeping silence" is at end. There is now frank, open, ingenuous confession.

What a blessed change! It is like passing from darkness to open day. It is like coming out from the concealment and foulness of a dungeon to the presence of a merciful judge. And the response is immediate (ver. 5). The confession and the taking away are simultaneous. "Oh! admirable clemency. It requires nothing but that the offender should plead guilty, and this, not that it may more freely punish, but more liberally forgive. He requires that we should condemn ourselves, that so He may absolve us."—*Leighton*. "*Thou forgavest.*" "But that should not end the matter. Because of the Lord's mercy, nay, rather all the more on that very account, our sins should be still remembered. So it was with David. So it was with Paul, who, long after he had obtained mercy, continued to be exercised deeply about his sin, which was ever before him. So let it be with you, Oh, poor sinner! I call upon you, whatever and whosoever you are, to see your sin now, to embrace your Saviour now. You have sin enough upon your conscience now. Confess now. Believe now. But I call upon you, believing now, not lightly or hastily to dismiss the matter from your thoughts. Ponder your sin. Consider it in all its bearings. Be seeking ever, as it is ever before you, to get deeper, more searching, more humbling views of its exceeding sinfulness. For it is thus, and only thus, that by God's grace, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, you will be getting more and more of an insight into God's marvellous grace and love, and proving more and more thoroughly the blessedness of a full as well as a free forgiveness, of complete reconciliation, of perfect peace."—*Dr. Candlish*.

III. Confirmed by the experience of the godly of all ages (ver. 6). These words suggest—1. *The force of God's forgiving love*. It holds out hope to the chief of sinners. It inspires boldness in coming to the throne of grace. If God

forgives our *sin* freely, what is there we may not ask? (Rom. ii. 4; John xii. 32).

2. *The power of recorded examples of forgiven sinners*. Every forgiven sinner is a witness for Christ. What others preach as a doctrine, he proclaims as a fact. Bartimeus could say, "I was blind, but now I see." How much more powerful this testimony than the mere report, "He giveth the blind their sight." So, what multitudes have been won to Christ by the stories of the thief on the cross, Zaccheus, and Saul of Tarsus.

3. *The security and peace of the godly who have made Jehovah their refuge* (ver. 6). *They have sought mercy in an accepted time*. There is a day of grace. There is a time wherein God may be found (Isa. lv. 6, 7; Heb. iii.) Every pang of conscience, every sorrow of heart, every premonition of judgment, calls for instant action. Delay may be fatal. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power."

They have found a refuge adequate for every emergency (ver. 7). When God's judgments are let loose as a flood they are safe. They are like Noah in the ark, Israel in Goshen. The emphasis may be laid on "*him*." God's love is a personal love; He cares for individuals. When trials come they may touch the things without, but not those within. They may reach to the spoiling of goods and the filching of reputation, and even to the killing of the body, but they cannot touch the immortal spirit. When the tyrant Nicocreon ordered Anaxarchus to be beaten to death in a mortar, the brave answer was, "Beat and bray as thou wilt, Anaxarchus thou canst not touch." If a heathen could speak thus how much more a Christian!

They have secured delights which shall surround them all their days (ver. 7). "Compass me about," i.e., give me abundant cause, turn where I may, to praise Thee. Can this be the same man who, erewhile, was so wretched? What a wondrous change! Then the burden of sin, now pardon; then the grief of estrangement, now the joy of reconciliation; then the misery of a heart torn by conflicting passions and full of un-

rest, now the peace of God which passeth all understanding; then the terrors of judgment and of hell, now the songs of

angels and the love of God for ever. "*Selah.*" Fitly, indeed, may we be called to pause and ponder.

MULISHNESS.

(Verses 8-10.)

Mulishness is a hard, sullen, untractable spirit. It is held an offence among men, how much more heinous must it be when manifested towards God. Yet even good men have erred in this way. David speaks here from experience. He recalls with shame the time when he had in his pride "kept silence," and hardened his heart against the Lord; and speaks words of warning for others. Perhaps he had Solomon specially in view, but his words have a wider reference, and are fraught with instruction ("maskil") for all ages. We may understand him as speaking in the name of the Lord.

I. Mulishness thwarts the Divine plan. God has a will concerning us. He would have us to walk—1. *In the right way.* 2. *From conviction and choice.* Not of constraint, but willingly, as the result of understanding. 3. *Under His own fatherly guidance and protection.* "I will watch over thee with mine eye." "The guidance with the eye is a gentle guidance. A look is enough, as opposed to that bit and bridle, which the mulish nature requires."—*Perowne*. It is not only "I will instruct thee," i.e., make thee to understand, and "Teach thee in the way," i.e., to find and keep the right way, but also "I will guide thee with mine eye." "He will consider and consult upon us, He will not leave us to contingencies; no, nor to His general providence, by which all creatures are in His administration, but He will ponder us, consider us, study us; and that with His eye, which is the most sensible organ and instrument, soonest feels if anything be amiss, and so inclines Him quickly to rectify us." This implies "the constancy and perseverance of God's goodness towards us; to the end and in the end He will guide us. Except the eye of God can be put out, we cannot be put out of His sight and his care."—*John Donne*.

II. Mulishness debases the powers of the soul. "The mule is among various nations a proverbial type of stubborn persistency in evil, and we find analogous allusions to the horse in Jer. v. 8, viii. 6. The reason for using a comparison with brutes, is intimated in the second clause, to wit, that *the debased irrationality of sin* might be distinctly brought into view. The analogy is carried out, with no small subtilty, by representing that what seems to be the trappings or mere decoration of these brutes, is really intended to coerce them, just as that in which men pride themselves may be, and if necessary will be, used by God for their restraint and subjugation. The common version of the last clause—'*lest they come near unto thee,*'—would be suitable enough in speaking of a wild beast, but in reference to a mule or horse, the words can only mean, because they will not follow or obey thee of their own accord, they must be constantly coerced in the way both of compulsion and constraint."—*Alexander*. Degrading to—1. *Reason.* 2. *Conscience.* 3. *Affections.* The man who stubbornly refuses God's instruction necessarily sinks. He "loses the Divine property of his first being." He becomes like the brutes with "lower pleasures, lower pains." Instead of being guided from within, he is governed from without. Instead of being ruled by reason and through his affections, he is controlled and compelled as by force. "God never goes about to rule any by fear, but those who have first trampled upon love, and are no longer subjects but rebels."

III. Mulishness imperils the highest interests of being. To such as act in this way—peace, true progress, fellowship with God, the hope of a blessed immortality are impossible. Then, "Be

ye not as the horse or as the mule." Be warned,—this temper is not only unamiable, but bad. It is contrary to reason, contradicted by experience, condemned by revelation. Remember Cain, Balaam, Saul, Jonah. We should strive to rise instead of sink, we should aspire to be like the noblest and the best, who served God from love and not from fear. "We may consider mercies as the beamings of the Almighty's eye, when the light of His countenance is lifted upon us; and that man as guided by the eye, whom mercies attract and attach to his Maker. But oh! let us refuse to be guided by the eye, and it will become needful that we be curbed by the hand. If we abuse our mercies, if we forget their Author, and yield Him

not gratefully the homage of our affections, we do but oblige Him, by His love for our souls, to apportion to us disaster and trouble. Complain not, then, that there is so much of sorrow in your lot; but consider rather how much of it you may have wilfully brought upon yourselves. Ah! if you would account for many mercies that have departed, if you would insure permanence to those that are yet left, examine how deficient you may hitherto have been, and strive to be more diligent for the future, in obeying an admonition which implies that we should be guided by the soft lustres of the eye, if our obduracy did not render indispensable the harsh constraints of the rein."—*Henry Melville*.

SORROW AND MERCY JUSTLY DISTRIBUTED.

I. The sorrows of the wicked (ver. 10). 1. *Many*. 2. *Self caused*. 3. *Inevitable*. "Wicked." This is their character, and their lot corresponds. They refuse instruction. In pride and obstinacy they persist in their own evil thoughts and evil ways, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. And though God has provided a way of pardon they reject it. This is their damning sin. A rejected Saviour is hell.

"He endures—

What does he not? From lusts opposing in vain,
And self reproaching conscience. He foresees
The fatal issue to his health, fame, peace,
Fortune, and dignity; the loss of all
That can ennoble man, and make frail life,
Short as it is, supportable. Still worse—
Far worse than all the plagues with which his
sins
Infect his happiest moments, he forebodes
Ages of hopeless misery."—COWPER.

II. The mercy promised to the righteous. Mark their—1. *Character*. "Trusteth in the Lord." 2. *Their*

blessedness. "Mercy shall compass him about." "He shall be surrounded with mercy, as one is by the air, or by the sunlight."—*Barnes*. "Mercy" for soul and body. "Mercy" on every side and at every turn. "Mercy" amid all the varied trials of life. "Mercy" at death and judgment, and for ever and ever. "Mark that text," said Richard Atkins to his grandson who was reading to him this psalm. "I read it in my youth and believed it, and now I read it in my old age, and thank God, *I know it to be true*. Oh! it is a blessed thing in the midst of the joys and sorrows of the world to trust in the Lord."

Think of the light thrown upon both of these truths by the Word of God, the experience of men, and especially by the Cross of Christ. Let the sufferings and death of Jesus show the evil of sin, and the certain ruin of the ungodly. Let the example and life of Jesus show the blessedness of obedience, and the *eternal* joy of all who trust in the Lord.

JOY IN THE LORD CHRIST.

(Verse 11.)

I. Because of the beauty of His character. Everything meets in Him

that is perfect. He is supremely lovely and lovable.

"Intellectual culture may make indefinite progress, the natural sciences may push forth their limits and gain in profundity and extent, the human mind may expand as it will, but it will never surpass the moral culture of Christianity as seen in the Gospels."—*Goethe*.

"Only one life there is without a stain,
Accomplishing the Father's perfect will,
With highest aim, yet never aimed in vain,
Attempting nought which must be tried
again :
Even all the thoughts of God it did fulfil.

"Perfect the sinless beauty of His ways,
Perfect the wisdom of His faithful love;
Perfect the trust that walked with God
always,—
Perfect in suffering, perfect in the praise
Which still like incense rose to Heaven
above.

"Oh ! fairer thou than sons of men ! and yet
Not terrible Thy beauty. In sweet accord
All tender graces in Thy being met,
And of their fulness all Thy people get,
Still growing to the fulness of their Lord."
—WALTER SMITH.

II. Because of the splendour of His achievements. His victories are moral. He has vanquished sin and death. He still goes forth "conquering and to conquer." Wherever truth prevails, and righteousness is established, and immortal souls are rescued from sin and woe, and brought back to love and holiness, there we behold the works of the Son of God.

III. Because of the blessedness of His reign. The call to "rejoice" finds a response in every true heart. It is obeyed, not from constraint, but willingly; not so

much as a duty as a delight. It is the irrepressible impulse of admiration, gratitude, and love. When the poet Campani asked his friend Haydn how it happened that his church music was so cheerful, the beautiful answer was, "I cannot make it otherwise; I write according to the thoughts I feel. When I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap, as it were, from my pen; and since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I serve Him with a cheerful spirit."—*Whitecross Anecdotes*. "Beyond the sea was a noble lady, on whose house always the sun shone on the day, and on the night the moon. Of this many men marvelled. At the last, the fame of this came to the Bishop, a worthy man, and he went for to see her, hoping that she was of great penance in clothing, or in meat, or in other things. And when he came he saw her alway merry and glad. The Bishop said, 'Dame, what eat ye?' She answered, and said, 'Divers meats, and delicate.' Then he asked if she used the hair (the haircloths). She said, Nay. After this the Bishop marvelled. And when he had taken his leave of the lady, and was gone his way, he thought he would ask her more of another thing, and went again to her, and said, 'Love ye not mickle Jesus Christ?' She said, 'Yes, I love Him, for He is all my love; for when I think of His sweetness I may not withhold myself for gladness and mirth.'"—*Quoted by Lord Lyndsay from "Gesta Romanorum."*

PSALM XXXIII.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm is a fit companion, but by no means the second half, of the preceding one, being distinct from it both in matter and form. It indicates a more tranquil frame of mind, such as flows from the calm assurance of peace with God. There is nothing against its being of the time and from the pen of David. It consists of twenty-two verses, like the alphabetic psalms. It celebrates the praise of the God of providence and grace. It falls into two halves of eleven verses each. Between three verses of adoration at the beginning, and three of devotion at the end, stand eight verses on the creative, and eight on the saving Word of God."—*Murphy*.

THE CHARACTER OF TRUE WORSHIP.

(Verses 1-3.)

I. The worship of God is the chief joy of the good. "Ye righteous," ye who have the new heart, and so have accepted the mercy of God, and are accepted by Him."—*Murphy*. "Re-joice," i.e., exult, shout for joy. "The Hebrew verb, according to etymologists, originally means to dance for joy, and is therefore a very strong expression for the liveliest exultation."—*Alexander*. Joy is the soul of worship.

II. The worship of God is the highest duty of the good. 1. It is agreeable to their *character*. "The upright." "Praise in the mouth of a sinner is like an oracle in the lips of a fool: how uncomely is it for him to praise God whose whole life is a dishonour to God! The godly are only fit to be choristers in God's praise."—*Thomas Watson*. 2. It is agreeable to their *obligations*. "Those who have received from God a right spirit and the forgiveness of sins, have a twofold obligation to praise Him."—*Murphy*. 3. It is agreeable to their *circumstances*. Placed in the midst of God's works, and daily receiving fresh proofs of His loving-kindness in providence and grace, the upright are always in fitting circumstances for praise.

III. The worship of God is the noblest employment of the good. "Praise the Lord with harp." This is the first time musical instruments are referred to in the psalms. It is impossible now to ascertain the precise form of the "harp," and the "psaltery," and the "lute of ten strings." The chief thing to notice is, that they were used

as accompaniments and supports to the voice, as if the voice were too weak by itself to utter the Divine praises. Instruments of varied power and sweetness were employed, so as to secure the grandest effects. Ver. 3: "Sing unto Him a new song," not here one which has new marvels of God's power and grace for its theme, as in xl. 3, xcvi. 1 (cf. Rev. xiv. 3), but rather one which springs freshly from a thankful and rejoicing heart,—one which seeks to put an old theme to a new light."—*Perowne*. "Play skilfully." Do your best in playing. "With a loud noise." Music should not only be correct in execution, but joyous in spirit. The whole heart should be thrown into it.

The worship of God in song combines—1. *Unity and variety*. While there may be both vocal and instrumental music, there should be but one spirit.

2. *Sameness and freshness*. The same old psalms and hymns and spiritual songs may be sung, and yet there may be the freshness of ever-new wonder, love, and praise, while "new songs" may evermore spring from the heart of the revived Church.

3. *Devotion and art*. There is scope for the highest efforts of genius in the service of song. Music should be cultivated. Religion and science should go together. We should give our very best to God.

4. *Fellowship and individuality*. While the service is that of the congregation, every separate heart should take part.

THE REASONABLENESS OF WORSHIP.

(Verses 4-22.)

"For" introduces the reasons for praising God. The order of the thought is sufficiently marked to admit of the subject being treated under the heads of creation, providence, and redemption. God is to be worshipped, because—

I. He is the God of creation.

We are called to notice—1. *The moral character of God* (vers. 4, 5). Words and works are the exponents of character. The "word" is the idea, and the "work" is the fact. The "word" is

the promise, and the "work" is the performance. It is by His words and works that God reveals Himself. They are the expression and embodiment of His eternal purpose. And the great attributes which are seen in beautiful harmony in all God's words and works are *Righteousness and Goodness*. "He loveth righteousness," i.e., it is His habit and delight. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord," as conspicuously as the heaven with stars, as completely as the sea with waters. "Righteousness and goodness" are, as it were, *incarnated* in God's words and works, to be the study and delight of His people for ever.

2. *The glory of creation*. "From the present proofs of God's love in the earth, the thoughts of the sacred poet naturally goes back to the creation of all things, and as He had before declared what the 'word' and the 'work' of Jehovah are in their essential characters (ver. 4), so now He describes further the operation of that word, and the work which results therefrom."—*Perowne*. Ver. 6. There is allusion here to the history of Creation in Genesis. First the *mode*, and then the *extent*, of the Divine working are described. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." "The word," "the creative mandate" (Gen. i. 1). "All the host," the universe of things in their perfect order. This verse has special reference to the work of the second day. "Gathereth the waters." The primary allusion here is to the work of the third day. The verse, however, expresses not a finished act, but a continued process, displaying its variations in the dividing of the Red Sea and the Jordan. Vers. 8, 9. The consequent obligation to worship God, "Let all the earth fear the Lord." This carries on the thought to the second act of the third day, by which the dry land was clothed with vegetation, and the way prepared for the creation of animals and of man. The parallel of all the earth is all the inhabitants of the habitable globe.—*Murphy*. "The heavens and the sea are mentioned as the theatre of God's almighty power, as the earth before, of His loving-kindness; and thus the universe is summed up."—

Perowne. The argument is that Jehovah is the omnipotent Creator, and that we who are all His creatures, should worship Him with Holy reverence.

II. He is the God of providence.

"After speaking of God's power in creation, the psalmist goes on to speak of His providence as ordering the world."—*Perowne*. The providence of God is characterised as—I. *All Wise* (ver. 10). He who created and sustains the universe, can overrule or frustrate the designs of man, whether as individuals or nations, according as He deems right. We have a signal example of this in the history of Babel.

There is a contrast here between "the counsels" of men and the "counsel" of the Lord. Men come and go, and their thoughts are like the changing clouds, but God moves on in His ordained path, like the sun in the heavens, with unswerving fidelity. The counsels of men are like the edicts of arbitrary kings, which come to nought; but Jehovah's counsels are His eternal and benign purpose, which He works out by His almighty power, from generation to generation. This holds true, not only with regard to God's providence in general, but also with regard to His providence in its special bearing on His people. Hence the glad burst of praise (ver. 12), "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance."

2. *All Seeing* (vers. 13–15). "He not only observes men's doings, but knows their hearts, as having created them."—*Perowne*. "From the place of His dwelling" (ver. 14). This is a coincidence with the Song of Moses (Ex. xv. 17). This is His dwelling-place above, of which earth is an adumbration. "Fashioneth their hearts alike" (ver. 15). "The principle of reason in one heart is the identical with that in every other. Hence the capacity of mutual understanding and the certainty of human knowledge, as far as the moral reason retains its balance. 'He considereth,' not only understands, but observes with attention the conduct of His responsible creatures. There is a philosophy of human nature here."—*Murphy*.

3. *All Mighty* (vers. 16, 17). "The weakness and insufficiency of all human power, however great, as before of all human intellect. 'King and mighty man and horse' (i.e., war-horse, as elsewhere, 'chariot and horse') are selected as types of earthly power in all its greatness."—*Perowne*.

"People of God, he means to say, let not the world persuade you that the throne, on which your king is seated, is an idle easy chair; no, He is seated on a throne, on a judgment-seat, from the lofty eminence of which proceed the destinies of the world. People of God, he means to say, firmly believe that all things are either openly or in a hidden manner subject to the influence of His might; not only the works of men, which are evidently so, since the issue never rests with them, but also the secret movings of their hearts, which God can strike with blindness, and can make foolish the understanding of the prudent, and wise the heart of babes. People of God, believe not in appearances according to which kings conquer by their might, and warriors triumph in battle by the strength of their horses; it is appearance only, for, as all earthly power is borrowed from the Governor of the world, He may withdraw it at any time, and give it to whomsoever He pleases; so that all the victories on earth are won by His strength."—*Tholuck*.

III. *The God of redemption* (vers. 18–22). While mortal strength is vain for defence and security, they who fear the Lord and hope in His mercy shall be safe under Jehovah's eye, and kept by His almighty "power, through faith unto salvation." God is the only

true deliverer. His deliverance reaches to the soul, and transcends all the perils of time and all the powers of evil. "While such omnipotence terrifies those who love not the Lord, it is rich in consolation to those who hope in His mercy. The whole people commit themselves to the Lord, rejoicing in Him and trusting in *His name*."—*Tholuck*. "Antigonus, king of Syria, being ready to give battle near the Isle of Andreos, sent out a squadron to watch the motions of his enemies, and to descry their strength; return was made that they had more ships, and better manned, than he had. 'How,' says Antigonus, 'that cannot be, for how many dost thou reckon me,' intimating that the dignity of a general weighed down many others, especially when poised with valour and experience. And where is valour, where is experience to be found, if not in God? He is the Lord of Hosts; with Him alone is strength and power to deliver Israel out of all her troubles. He may do it, He can do it, He will do it. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength, besides Him there is no Saviour, no Deliverer. He is a shield to the righteous, strength to the weak, a refuge to the oppressed."—*John Spencer*.

"Dear dying Lamb! Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save;
When this poor lisping stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave."—*Cowper*.

THREE ASPECTS OF PIETY.

(Verses 20–22.)

I. *Piety waiting on the Lord*. "Our soul waiteth for the Lord." Waiting is an attitude of soul. It is holding one's self still till the accomplishment of some expected event. It is, therefore, patience and expectation united. "We wait" for the day, that we may work. We wait for the spring to sow and the

harvest to reap. But waiting is consistent with action. It is not only testing and disciplinary, but it implies a right use of means and opportunities, working while it is day, and sowing and reaping as the seasons of God come round. True waiting implies faith in God's love. Heedfulness of His will

(Ps. cxliii. 3). Intense desire for His blessing (Ps. cxxx. 6). Diligent use of all the means of grace. And what encouragement we have here to wait upon Him. "For *He is our help and shield.*"

II. Piety rejoicing in God. "Our heart shall rejoice in Him." This is not merely rejoicing in God's Word and works, but rejoicing in *Himself*. This is the highest attainment of piety. But this joy is one of the fruits of faith. "Because we have trusted in His holy name." The more we know of God's grace in

Christ, the more shall our hearts exult in Him.

III. Piety praying to God. "Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee." This prayer is marked by *humility*. "Mercy" is sought, mercy for the sinner, the mercy of the Lord which bringeth salvation. This prayer is also marked by *faith*. It implies confidence in God's grace and in His promises, and in the reality of His Spirit's work in the heart. The hope He begets He will not put to shame (Matt. ix. 29).

PSALM XXXIV.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm is assigned by the superscription to the occasion when David, persecuted by Saul, fled to the Philistines, and being brought before Achish was driven away by him as a madman (1 Sam. xxi. 22, see Ps. 7). There is no sufficient reason for rejecting the historical validity of this statement. The psalms generally rise above the level of the particular occasion, and dwell on general principles, and so it is here. This psalm is eucharistic and didactic. It is full of thankfulness to the Almighty Deliverer, who defends the penitent against the ungodly. It is a lesson from experience for those who are tempted and afflicted. It is the second of the alphabetic psalms (Ps. xxv.), the letter *vau* being omitted, and a second *pe* added at the end."—*Murphy*. "This psalm was selected by the ancient Church to be a communion song (Cyrill. *Catech. Myst.* v. 17); and from the expression, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good,' and from its evangelical strain, it was well adapted for this purpose."—*Murphy*.

A SONG OF PRAISE.

(Verses 1-7.)

"Every day of a pious man's life is marked with the monuments and tokens of the mercy of God, so that he has every day to sing a new song. But each separate experience of that kind should fill our heart to such a degree, as to furnish the theme of gratitude and praise for the entire period of our lives. With a feeling of this kind we see David celebrate the deliverance he has just experienced."—*Tholuck*. We should praise God—

I. For what He is in Himself. "The Lord 'Jehovah.'" "This is the only name of God in the psalm. The self-existent Creator is the great watchword of the intelligent creation."—*Murphy*. Contemplation of God's character calls forth praise. This praise is, 1. *Free*. "I will." It is from the

heart. It is a life, not a form; a delight, not a burden. 2. *Constant*. "At all times;" circumstances alter, but God changes not. In adversity and in prosperity, in the dark hour of sorrow as in the bright moments of joy, God claims our praise. "Continually," the lamps, the shew-bread, the daily sacrifice, the priests ministering in the tabernacle continually, were witnesses to the perpetuity of spiritual worship (Ex. xxv. 30, xxvii. 20, xxix. 42). 3. *Exulting*. "Boast," "glory," i.e., "to exult in the possession and enjoyment of some admired and beloved object."—*Alexander*. Many glory in their strength, in their riches, in their learning, in their religion. God is the true object of glory. He alone can satisfy and bless the soul for ever

(Jer. ix. 23, 24). 4. *Influential*. "The humble, *i.e.*, the poor and needy, or the meek who bow their hearts to God. The boastings of the worldly are an offence. They have the bad odour of selfishness. But the extolling of the Lord is pleasant to the ear of His people, and strikes a chord of sympathy in their inmost hearts. As one touch of nature makes the whole world kin, so one touch of grace makes the whole Church kin. As one songster in the morning wakens the music of the grove, so one soul hymning the praise of Jehovah calls forth the voices of other kindred souls, till the Church resounds with songs of praise (ver. 3). 5. *Social*. "O magnify the Lord with me." It is not that we can add to God's glory, He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Nothing we do can increase or diminish His glory. But His name may be said to grow in glory as it is made known; and His character to stand higher in the sight of men, as He becomes more and more the supreme object of trust and love. "Let us exalt His name together." Here is the place for union and concert; social worship is the craving of the new heart, and the outgrowth of the new life. In heaven it finds its highest expression, and earth is the likeliest heaven, where it most abounds.

II. For what He does for His people (vers. 4-7). 1. *Personal deliverances* (ver. 4). This may refer to God's rescue of David in the land of the Philistines. He was then in great peril. There were fears on every side. His own conscience was not free, for in his selfish care to save his life he had sinned against truth and against God. But in his straits he sought the Lord. Sin should not deter us from prayer. Rather should the sense of sin make us pray the more earnestly. We have an Advocate with God the Father. There are gifts even for the rebellious. Where sin abounded grace hath much more abounded. "He delivered me from all my fears." "To have delivered me from all my troubles had been a great favour, but a far greater to deliver me from all my fears; for where that would have but freed me from present evil, this secures me from evil to come, that

now I enjoy not only tranquillity, but security—a privilege only of the godly. The wicked may be free from trouble, but can they be free from fear? No; God knows, though they be not in trouble like other men, yet they live in more fear than other men."—*Baker*.

2. *Brighter days for the afflicted*. "They looked," *viz.*, the afflicted mentioned in ver. 2; or it may only mean generally, "men looked;" others, *i.e.*, besides myself, have in like manner experienced God's lovingkindness. "Were lightened," *i.e.*, "were bright with gladness because He heard them, reflecting, as it were, the light of His countenance" (*cf.* iv. 6).—*Perowne*. Here is the look of the soul to God, and the quick response of God, as when the Israelites looked to the serpent of brass and were healed (Numb. xxi. 9), and sinners look on Him whom they pierced (Zech. xii. 11), and their hearts are melted to penitential sorrow. "Lightened." "This is the precise answer to a look. The light of the truth, the promise, and the countenance of God, fill and illuminate the eyes of the soul."—*Murphy*. How often is this fulfilled. Remember Gideon. Hence, instead of the blush of shame, there is the brightness of joy; instead of the shudder of fear, there is the song of victory. Each one, as he remembers what God has done, speaks as for himself. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard."

3. *Divine guardianship for the godly to the end*. "The angel of the Lord." This remarkable phrase occurs only twice in the psalms, here, and in the next psalm. It denotes one who is at the same time the angel of Jehovah and Jehovah Himself (Gen. xvi. 7; Ex. xxiii. 20). "He is God manifest to man, and mediating for man."—*Murphy*. "Encampeth." There may be reference here to what Jacob said when the angels met him (Gen. xxxii. 1, 2). "This is God's host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim" (two camps). The angel host is under the headship of Christ, and charged with the care of His people. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation!"

THREE VIEWS OF RELIGION.

(Verses 8-10.)

I. What religion is. Plainly it is something belonging to the soul, not a ritual, but a life. It is also something personal, as between the soul and God, and not any service which can be rendered for us by priest or proxy. It is suggested here that religion consists in—

1. *Personal faith that God is good.*
2. *Personal devotedness to God as good.*
3. *Personal communion with God as good.*

“Religion in the understanding is the knowledge of God (Hos. iv. 1); of His will and commandments; it is the knowledge of His ‘mystery’ or secret counsel revealed in Christ (Eph. i. 17). When the Jewish law had been given, religion was practically a ‘walking in the law of the Lord’ (Ps. cxix. 1; cf. Luke i. 6); when the Christian revelation has been made it is an ‘acknowledgment of the truth which is after godliness’ (Tit. i. 1). But in this truth, in that law, it seeks a Person; it is fundamentally the maintenance of a real relation with the Personal God, or with a Divine Person, really incarnate in Jesus Christ. Accordingly religion, both Jewish and Christian, is described as a covenant; it is a bond or understanding between the nature, or the soul, and God, or still more, from the point of view of a faith which worketh by love, it is personal communion with God (1 John i. 3). Thus religious life is more than feeling, than knowledge, than obedience to a moral code. It is the sacred bond freely accepted, generously, enthusiastically, persistently welcomed, whereby the soul engages to make a continuous expenditure of its highest powers in attaching itself to the personal source and Object of its being.”—*Canon Liddon*.

II. What religion does. It is thoroughly practical. It is God’s power in the soul, and worketh in every one to bring us nearer and nearer to Himself.

1. *Establishes right relations between the soul and God.* Right relations are

of great importance. It is so among men; much more with God. If the relations of the soul to God are wrong, all is wrong. If the relations of the soul to God are right, all will be right. Now, in religion, “the heart is made right with God.” There is “trust” (ver. 8). There is reverential “fear” (ver. 9). There is holy aspiration and endeavour, the continual seeking of God (ver. 10).

2. *Effects a moral transformation of character* (ver. 9). “Fear the Lord, ye His saints.” “This is the moral consequence of becoming acquainted with God and His goodness.”—*Murphy*. Those who are in a right relation to God, and who love and trust Him, are not only “His saints” in respect to consecration, but they become more and more “His saints” as regards character.

3. *Ensures the highest blessedness of being* (ver. 10). “The young lions are here the representatives of those who glory in their own strength and resources.”—*Murphy*. The meaning is, “that while the most powerful and least scrupulous of men may be reduced to want, the people of God shall be abundantly and constantly provided for.”—*Alexander*. (Cf. Job iv. 10, 11; Ps. lvii. 4; Nahum ii. 12-14; Ezek. xix. 2, xxxviii. 13; Is. xl. 30, 31). “They shall not want any good.”

III. What Religion deserves (ver. 10). This is the language of experience. It breathes faith, and hope, and love. It is an appeal to the deepest feelings of the heart. It implies that if men would only make trial of religion for themselves, they could not fail to be convinced of its supreme excellence.

Religion deserves—1. *Earnest study*. We are bound to investigate. That only is truth to us which commends itself to our own conscience. Our faith should stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. “Search the Scriptures.” Remember how the

Boreans were praised for their independent and earnest examination of the truth (Acts xvii. 11). Surely that which is the most wondrous thing in the world, and which concerns us all so nearly, should be personally and profoundly studied.

2. *Personal Trial.* "Taste and see." Nothing is so convincing as experience. Only by trial can we truly realise what religion is and what it does. It is one thing to hear honey called sweet, and another thing to know that honey is sweet, because we have tasted it for ourselves. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself" (*cf.* 1 John v. 10).

3. *Hearty commendation.* It is the duty of every godly man to commend religion to others. Loyalty to God and

love to our brethren alike bind us to this. We should be careful to give a just representation, such as will attract instead of repel. By our humility, our patience, our love, our trust in God, and our purity in the sight of men, we should be true witnesses for our holy religion, *true preachers of Christ.*

"O taste and see that God is good." This voice comes to us from nature, sounds throughout the Scriptures, and is echoed by the godly of all generations. Let us take it up for ourselves. "The inquiry of truth, which is the wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoyment of it, is the sovereign good of human nature." —*Bacon.*

AN ADULLAM SERMON.

(Verses 11-14.)

We may imagine that these words formed the substance of an address on some quiet Sabbath in the Cave of Adullam.

Consider I. The Congregation.

We learn from 1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2, that David fled from Achish to Adullam in Judah. And "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men." What a strange gathering! What diversities in age, and conduct, and experience! But they had much in common. They were involved in the same cruel fate, and animated with the same resolve, to stand by each other, and to struggle to the uttermost for life and liberty under their chosen leader.

II. The Preacher.

David was a man singularly fitted to address such an audience. His manly presence, his chivalrous nature, his romantic history, his fame as a soldier and poet, his identification with the poor and the oppressed, and with all that was noblest in his country's history, and above all, his simple faith, must have given him

an extraordinary position and power. While his men felt that he was truly one of themselves, they must have also felt that he was raised above them, with a higher character and destiny. He seemed to them born to be a king of men. With what rapt attention and eager hopes would they hang upon his lips.

"Children." The word expresses both authority and tenderness. As Venema, in substance expounds, he might have called them children, "because he was about to be their teacher, and they his disciples; and again, because they were young men, in the flower of their age, and as sons, would be the builders up of his house; and still more, because as their leader, to whose discipline and command they were subject, he had a right to address them as his children." —*C. H. S.*

III. The Sermon.

1. *The subject was supremely important.* "The fear of the Lord." They had common trials, attachments, and hopes, but beyond these, they needed religion—the fear of Jehovah—to unite their hearts in the truest sense, and to make them strong.

2. *The treatment was singularly appropriate and effective.*

He invites their attention. "Hearken unto me."

He addresses their understanding and conscience. "I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

He appeals to their affections and hopes. "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days, that he may see good?"

He demands the obedience of their hearts and lives (vers. 13, 14). The tongue must be kept from evil, and the lips from guile. This could not be done without the renewal of the heart, and earnest personal effort. They had many temptations, wrongs to exasperate them, the prosperity of their enemies to make them envious and revengeful, and the hard struggle for existence to make their life bitter. Some might say, they could only succeed by fraud and violence, by

returning evil for evil. But not so. Let them trust in God and do the right. Let them keep themselves pure, and be followers of peace. Only thus could they enjoy the favour of God.

"Life is happiness; good days are happy days. Happiness consists in enjoying God's favour. His favour is life, His loving-kindness is better than life. To have His eye resting complacently on us, to be the objects of His love and care, to have His ear open to our prayers, to have Him, infinitely powerful, wise, and good, always ready to listen to our petitions, and supply our need; this is life, this is happiness. While, on the other hand, to have His face set against us, to have His countenance covered with frowns, to have Him looking out at us as He did, out of the pillar of cloud, on the Egyptians struggling with the billows, this is misery."—*Dr. J. Brown on 1st Peter.*

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

(Verses 15–22.)

In the sight of God society is divided into two classes. The principle of classification is not rank, wealth, learning, or worldly power, but character. On the one side are the righteous, and on the other the wicked. The difference between them is vital. They are utterly opposed in their principles and conduct, and God recognises this in His treatment of them. It is the old, old story, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ." God's people are—

I. The objects of His Fatherly regard (ver. 15). "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." The eyes and the ears are the great sources of intelligence. The terms as applied to God may imply—1. Perfect knowledge. 2. Abiding sympathy. 3. Gracious interposition. As a father watches his child, and is ever ready to act for its good, so our heavenly Father deals with His people. They are individually the objects of His unceasing care. The awful contrast is

depicted in the condition of the wicked (ver. 16). God is against them, and they are doomed to destruction.

II. The subjects of His holy discipline (vers. 17–21). They have trials as well as joys. This world is to them often a scene of suffering. But they are not forsaken. God is with them. They have the sense of His love to cheer them. They have the promises of His Word to comfort them. They have the ministers of His providence and Spirit to chasten and to profit them. And evermore the throne of grace is open to them, to which they may come boldly in the name of Jesus, "that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The whole of God's dealings with His people are disciplinary. They are weak and sinful, and God dealeth with them as with children. He is training them through suffering for glory. Affliction leads to prayer, prayer leads to increased faith, and increased faith to more of love, and patience, and humility, to

wider sympathies, and nobler aims, and holier joys. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart." What a comforting word! The Lord is nigh in all His tenderness and pity, in all His power and grace. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

Mark, again, the *terrible contrast*. "Evil shall slay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate." Afflictions are to them calamities instead of chastisements. Under them they grow worse instead of better.

Whatever seemed to be good in them is destroyed, and in the end they are left alone and hopeless in their misery and guilt.

III. The recipients of His redeeming grace (ver. 22). From first to last God's purpose is to do them good. And all is of grace. The righteous did not of themselves merit God's love and His deliverances. What He has done for them in providence and in grace has been done for them in and through Christ, and unto the praise of the glory of His name for ever and ever.

PSALM XXXV.

INTRODUCTION.

"This psalm, if it be as the inscription tells us a psalm of David, must have been composed either during his persecution by Saul or during the revolt of Absalom. It is usual to connect it with his words in 1 Sam. xxiv. 15. Its peculiar feature is, that the enemies on whom the poet imprecates the righteous judgments of God are men who had formerly been his friends, men for whom he had prayed in their sorrow 'with a brother's heart,' and who now requited his love with ungrateful hatred. Such an enemy Saul may have been; but we never find any trace of bitterness in David's feelings towards Saul. The generous enemy whose heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt, and who always recognised in Saul the Lord's anointed, would never have called down the judgments of God upon his head. It seems to me, therefore, more probable, that the aiders and abettors of Absalom's conspiracy, men like Ahithophel and his associates, are aimed at in the poet's burning words. But all this, and even the authorship itself, must be matter of conjecture. The psalm falls into three principal divisions, each of which closes with a thanksgiving."—*Perowne*.

WHOLE PSALM.

The views taken of the spirit and purpose of this psalm vary greatly. Some interpreters hold that there is reference throughout to the Messiah. Thus, A. A. Bonar writes, "This is an awful psalm. Let us read it as the words of the Lord Jesus, and what do we find? We find Him praying to the Father for help, and then consenting to the doom of His relentless, impenitent foes; yea, rather pronouncing the doom with His own lips, even as when He shall say to the barren fig-tree, 'Cut it down,' and to those on the left hand, 'Depart.' It is in that spirit He says, 'Let them be confounded' (vers. 4-6). This is their sentence uttered by the lips of the Judge. It is not the wish of one who is revengeful; it is the utterance of justice compelled by the state

of parties to speak in stern severity. Our Lord Himself quotes ver. 19, 'They hated me without a cause,' in John xv. 25, on the last evening He spent with His disciples before He suffered. For then He found Himself in the very situation so strikingly described in vers. 11, 12,—false witnesses rising up—men rewarding His whole career of kindness by spoiling His soul."

Other interpreters strongly oppose this opinion. Thus, Dr. David Thomas calls the supposition that the psalm is prophetic of the Messiah, "simple blasphemy." He says, "There is nothing of the spirit of Christ in the psalm; it is eternally antagonistic to the teachings of His Sermon on the Mount, and to the tenor of His whole life. This poem burns with vengeance

from beginning to end." As an exponent of the more general opinion, Perowne may be quoted. "But how are we to account for such prayers for vengeance at all? Are these the mere outbursts of passionate and unsanctified feeling, or are they the legitimate expression of a righteous indignation? Are they to be excused as being animated by 'the spirit of Elias,' a spirit not unholy, indeed, but far removed from the meekness and gentleness of Christ? or are they stereotyped forms in which the spirit of Christian devotion may utter itself? Are they Jewish only, or may they be Christian also? An un instructed fastidiousness, it is well known, has made many persons recoil from reading these psalms at all. Many have found their lips falter when they have been called to join in using them in the congregation, and have either uttered them with bated breath and doubting heart, or have interpreted them in a sense widely at variance with the letter. Some have tried to reconcile them with a more enlightened conscience by regarding such words, not as the expression of a wish, but as the utterance of a prediction; but the Hebrew optative, which is distinct enough from the simple future, absolutely forbids this expedient. Others, again, would see in them expressions which may lawfully be used in the soul's wrestling against spiritual enemies. And, finally, some would defend them as utterances of righteous zeal for God's honour, and remind us that if we do not sympathise with such zeal, it may be, not because our religion is more pure, but because our hearts are colder.

Now, the real source of the difficulty lies in our not observing and bearing in mind the essential difference between the Old Testament and the New. The older dispensation was in every sense a sterner one than the new. The spirit of Elias, though not an evil spirit, was not the spirit of Christ (Luke ix. 55). And through Him His disciples are made partakers of the same spirit. But this was not the spirit of the older economy. The Jewish nation had been trained in a sterner school. It had been steeled and hardened by the discipline which had

pledged it to a war of extermination with idolaters, and however necessary such a discipline might be, it would not tend to foster the gentler virtues. It is conceivable how even a righteous man under it, feeling it to be his bounden duty to root out evil wherever he saw it, and identifying, as he did, his own enemies, with the enemies of Jehovah, might use language which to us appears unnecessarily vindictive. To men so trained and taught, what we call "religious toleration" was a thing not only wrong, but absolutely inconceivable. It may be quite true that we find revenge forbidden as directly in the Old Testament as in the New, as, for instance, in Lev. xix. 18. And it may be no less true that we find instances of imprecation in the New (*cf.* 2 Tim. iv. 14; Acts xxiii. 3; and 1 Cor. xvi. 23). But even these expressions are very different from the varied, deliberate, carefully constructed, detailed anathemas of the psalms. And our Lord's denunciations, to which Hengstenberg refers, are in no way parallel. They are not curses upon individuals, but, in fact, solemn utterances of the great truth: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." But, after all, whatever may be said of particular passages, the general tone which runs through the two covenants is unquestionably different. To deny this is not to honour Moses, but to dishonour Christ (Matt. v. 43, xix. 8). On the other hand, we must not forget that these imprecations are not the passionate longing for personal revenge. The singer undoubtedly sees in his enemies the enemies of God and His Church. They that are not with Him are against God. And because the zeal of God's house ever consumes him, he prays that all the doers of iniquity may be rooted out. The indignation, therefore, is righteous, though it may appear to us wrongly directed, or excessive in its utterance. Once more, the very fact that a dark cloud hid God's judgments in the world to come from the view of the Old Testament saints, may be alleged in excuse of this their desire to see Him take vengeance on His enemies here. How deeply the problem of God's right-

eousness exercised their minds is abundantly evident from numerous places in the psalms. They longed to see that righteousness manifested. It could be manifested, they thought, only in the evident exaltation of the righteous, and the evident destruction of the wicked, here. Hence, with their eye always fixed on temporal recompense, they could even wish and pray for the destruction

of the ungodly. The awful things of the world to come were to a great extent hid from their eyes. Could they have seen them, then, surely, their prayer would have been, not "Let the angel of the Lord persecute them," but rather, with Him who hung on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

I AM THY SALVATION.

(Verses 1-10.)

Revenge was alien to the spirit of David, both as a man and as a prophet of the Lord (1 Sam. xxiv. 9, Ps. vii. 3-5). It seems just, therefore, as it certainly is more pleasant, to regard him as speaking here, not from personal animosity, but from a holy indignation against evil and evil-doers. At first sight, we might imagine that he had particular individuals in view; whether he had or not, we cannot tell. It is sufficient for us to take his vehement cries for Divine judgment, as applicable more to principles than persons. This interpretation seems in accordance with Paul's use of Ps. v. 9, in his argument for the corruption of human nature (Rom. iii. 13). It is also agreeable to our circumstances, as under the dispensation of the gospel (Matt. v. 43-45, Rom. xii. 19-21).

Vers. 1-10. The key-note of this passage is found in ver. 3. "Say unto my soul, *I am thy salvation.*" This is confirmed by the form of the thanksgiving in ver. 9. "And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in *His salvation.*" Outward deliverances are but types of inward deliverances. The salvation of God cannot be held as consummated short of the eternal redemption of the soul.

I. Salvation is from God (vers. 1-3). "O Lord." "The name Jehovah, the self-existent Creator, occurs eight times; Adonai, the rightful governor, three times; and Elohim, the everlasting Almighty, twice in this psalm. These names are in keeping with the tenor of the psalm, as it speaks of mercy and of

judgment."—*Murphy*. "The manifestation of God's saving and protecting power is described in Scripture, under various figures corresponding to the form of the particular suffering or danger. Against injustice He appears as an advocate or Judge (ver. 23), against violence as a warrior (Deut. xxxii. 41, 42). In this character the psalmist here entreats Him to appear, and for that end to seize, grasp, or lay hold of his weapons."—*Alexander*. "Such figurative representations of God tend to give us a more vivid apprehension of His powerful help."—*Tholuck*. "Plead, O Lord, with them that strive with me." This means, "Oppose my opposers, devour my devourers, strive with my strivers." "Shield and buckler" were weapons of defence. They may represent "the greater and the lesser protections of providence." "Draw out the spear," *i.e.*, for attack. "Stop the way," *i.e.*, encounter and thwart the persecutor. "Say unto my soul, *I am thy salvation.*" This appeal expresses the faith and hope of the believer. Nothing is so fitted to give courage as the sense of Jehovah's presence and love. The cause of His people is His cause. He identifies Himself with them.

II. Salvation implies death to evil, and life to good (vers. 4-8). "The psalmist regards all men simply as they stand with God, and therefore divides them into those who accept His mercy, and those who are at enmity with Him. And his own enemies he regards solely as the enemies of God; so long as they

continue in this frame of mind, he has no prayers for them, but that they may be disappointed in their ungodly designs. Such a result is the only one likely to bring them to a better mind. Plainly he views them as incorrigible offenders, who will never come to themselves but by the rough handling of adversity, if even by that. If they know anything of God, and still defy Him, it is obvious that nothing but the actual experience that He cannot be defied will bring them to repentance. And if that will not do it, he looks upon them as reprobates."—*Murphy*. Carrying out the figure of Jehovah as a Man of War, the psalmist depicts with terrific force the discomfiture of His enemies. 1. *Shameful defeat* (ver. 4). They are not only arrested, but driven back in confusion. All their malicious efforts are frustrated. Their faces are covered with shame. So it was in a gracious sense with Saul of Tarsus, but, alas! it is seldom that defeat implies repentance. 2. *Headlong rout* (ver. 5). "Chaff" is the emblem of vanity (Ps. i. 4), as "the Wind" is the emblem of judgment. In the previous psalm (xxxiv. 7), the angel of the Lord is represented as the angel of mercy, here as the angel of judgment, presiding over the storm that sweeps away God's enemies. There is a similar contrast in the story of Peter's deliverance and Herod's doom (Acts xii. 7). 3. *Overwhelming ruin* (vers. 6-8). The image seems that of an army broken and driven back in horrid rout, and confusion worse confounded. With such terrible scenes David as a soldier was not unfamiliar. "Let their way be dark and slippery." Let it be *dark*, so that they cannot see, and *slippery*, so that they cannot find safe footing. How terrible the fate of God's enemies, with no way of escape before, and the avenger pressing hard behind. Ver. 7. "For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit." The reference is to the artifices used for taking birds and beasts of prey. "*Without cause*," "wantonly, gratuitously, unprovoked, and therefore prompted by mere malice."—*Alexander*. This is their condemnation. Ver. 8 indicates how the ruin of the wicked is

self caused, and will come upon them at last sudden and awful, as the *crash* of a falling house.

III. *Salvation demands everlasting gratitude and praise* (vers. 9, 10). "Neither revenge nor any other form of selfishness is the source of the soul's joy, but only the Lord and His salvation. 'All my bones.' This is the vehement figure employed by a healthy and hearty gratitude. 'Lord, who is like Thee.' This verse amplifies the thought of the preceding one. 'Delivering the humble.' There is a union of justice and benevolence, which exhibits at the same time the strength and the charm of the moral government of God. The very same act delivers the oppressed, and defeats the oppressor."—*Murphy*. "He would not be worthy of the name of man who should look calmly on the tyrant, the swindler, or the murderer, building up his fortunes on the misery and ruin of his fellowmen, and thwarting with cold, determined malignity every effort of the righteous and the benevolent to improve their condition. As little would he be worthy of the name of Christian, who could survey unmoved the efforts of unprincipled men, to hold the souls of their fellows in eternal darkness, and drag them back into the gulf of destruction, when others were helping them to glory, honour, and immortality. The first wish of the Christian for such persons is, that their hearts may be changed. He would fain save the persons, and in the spirit of his forgiving Master, he would welcome them to the mercy and the blessedness he himself has found. But come what may of themselves, the only wish he can have respecting their cause is, that it may utterly perish. And if they cling to the pernicious cause, in spite of every effort to show them its wickedness; and to impress them with its doom, if the cause, and the persons upholding it, become so indissolubly blended that the one cannot be destroyed without the other; why, then, in spite of sickly sentimentalism, it is the manly duty of God's servant to call for the destruction of both; and it is with a holy satisfaction he is enabled to anticipate the fulfilment

of his desire. No soft sympathy for doomed individuals who, in their determined wickedness, have scorned every warning, and resisted every appeal, shall hinder the servant of God from rejoicing when by their overthrow, millions are freed from fetters, and are enabled to set forward on a glorious career of light, liberty, and joy."—*W. G. Blaikie*.

God's rescues not only call forth gratitude of His people on earth, but awaken the songs of heaven. As there is joy amongst the angels over one sinner that repenteth, so there are exulting alleluias over the overthrow of God's enemies, and the final triumph of His kingdom (Rev. xix. 1-3).

EVIL FOR GOOD.

(Verses 11-18.)

I. Innocence calumniated (ver 11). "Unjust witnesses."—*Delitzsch*. "Unscrupulous witnesses."—*Perowne*. These were men accustomed to violence and deceit. They wished to ruin David, and as they could not accuse him truly, they had no scruple in accusing him falsely. They even endeavoured to wring from him a confession of crimes, which he had not only not committed, but of which he had no knowledge. "To please Saul, there were always men to be found mean enough to impeach David."—*Spurgeon*. Such things are still done.

II. Goodwill repaid with bereavement (ver. 12). There was nothing but kindness on David's part, but his enemies returned evil for good (*cf.* Saul, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17). They had no pity. Their conduct wounded him deeply. "Spoiling of soul," *i.e.*, bereaving my soul. "David sent his parents to the king of Moab for safety; he was severed from Michal his wife and from Jonathan his friend, and he was estranged not only from Saul, but from all his court."—*Murphy*. "Very touching are the words, 'My soul is bereaved,' I am alone in the world; I who have ever sought to help the friendless and comfort the afflicted, and who prayed so earnestly for others, am forsaken of all."—*Perowne*.

III. Brotherly kindness requited with hatred (vers. 13, 14). "The general idea is, that he displayed the deepest sympathy with their distresses. This idea is expressed by figures borrowed from the oriental mourning usages.

Sackcloth, fasting, and prayer, are particularly mentioned."—*Alexander*.

"Yet I," emphatic in contrast with their selfishness.

"Sackcloth," the raiment of sympathy and sorrow.

"Fasting," the idea of overpowering compassion. "My prayer returned," "was again and again repeated on their behalf. 'In my bosom,' in the silent aspirations of my heart."—*Murphy*. "As one that mourneth for his mother, I went softly about in mourning attire." *Delitzsch*. The loss of a mother is held in the East as the saddest of all bereavements. "How few professors in these days have such bowels of compassion; and yet under the Gospel there should be far more tender love than under the law. Had we more hearty love to mankind, and care for its innumerable ills, we might be far more useful; certainly we should be infinitely more Christlike. 'He prayeth best, who loveth best.'"—*Spurgeon*.

IV. Misfortune met with derision (ver. 15). "But in mine adversity." Whether his affliction was in body or outward condition, it was made the occasion of scorn instead of comfort, and that by the most abject. "At my halting, when I leaned to one side from the upright posture of prosperity. When they saw the first change in the countenance of Saul towards him, their envy was gratified."—*Murphy*.

"When I limped, cripples mocked at me, *i.e.*, those who were themselves contemptible treated me with contempt. 'I did not know it.' It was done be-

hind my back, and while I was entirely insuspicious. "They rent or tore me" by their slanders."—*Alexander*.

V. Piety made the subject of ribaldry and scorn (ver. 16). The language here is obscure. Perowne translates "with them that are profane in their outlandish mockings." Delitzsch, "after the manner of common parasites." Alexander, "with worthless mockers for bread." The reference seems to be to hangers on at the tables of the rich (lit. "cake-mockers"), who were wont for hire or a "bit of bread" to play the buffoon, and to make entertainment for the guests. Piety would be a common subject for their mockery. Thus it has been often in the world. There have been historians who have sneered at things sacred. There have been novelists who have ridiculed evangelical religion. There have been poets who have prostituted their genius to make piety the sport of fools. Even to this day there are men so base, that to gratify their patrons, in a word, "*for a bit of bread,*" they will

sell the truth, mock at purity, and cast contempt on all that is holy and God-like.

"Very forcibly might our Lord have used the words of these verses! Let us not forget to see the despised and rejected of men here painted to the life. Calvary and the ribald crew around the cross seem brought before our eyes."—*Spurgeon*.

Vers. 17, 18. "The sufferer's appeal to the Lord." "Lord," Adonai, the governor who is bound to administer justice. "How long" (Ps. vi. 3-13). This is the expostulation of the sufferer under persecution. How often has it been uttered!

"From their destructions," their destructive intents and endeavours. "My only one" (Ps. xxii. 20).

"Young lions" (Ps. xxxiv. 10), in human shape. Ver. 18. "I will thank." Confess Thy name, especially Thy goodness. "A mighty people." Mighty for their numbers, and their communion with God.—*Murphy*.

THE CAUSELESS HATER.

(Verses 19-28.)

I. His character (vers. 19-22). He is described as *false*, "false enemies;" as *spiteful*, "my haters without cause," i.e., "out of sheer spite."—*Alexander*. (Ps. vii. 4; xxv. 3; cf. John xv. 25), As *turbulent*. "For they speak not peace, but they devise words of deceit against the quiet in the land," i.e., "the land of promise, considered as the home of God's chosen people, who, as its rightful proprietors, are characteristically peaceful, and averse to all strife and disorder."—*Alexander*. He is further described as adding *insult* to *injury* (ver. 21). "The gaping mouth, insulting laugh, and glaring eye, are the rude indications of malice."—*Murphy*. Thus his enemies hated Daniel (Dan. vi. 4), thus Haman hated Mordecai (Esther iii. 5, 6), thus the ten brethren hated Joseph. Every conscious malicious effort strengthens the unholy passion. "Whom we have injured we are sure to hate."

There is a fiendish joy in the discovery of any fault which may afford some excuse for the conduct pursued (Micah vii. 8).

In *hating without a cause*, they may be said not merely to hate truth and goodness, but to hate God Himself. It is the spirit of hell (cf. John xv. 18-25; 1 John ii. 9; iii. 15, iv. 20).

II. His righteous doom (vers. 22-26). There is here a twofold and earnest appeal to God for judgment. He is regarded—1. *As a silent witness*. "Thou hast looked on, O Lord, be not silent." Mine enemies "are not the only witnesses of my distress, for Thou, Lord, likewise seest, and hast long seen it. Seeing it, therefore, be no longer silent."—*Alexander*.

2. *As an almighty friend*. "O Lord, be not far from me." Be my shield and helper. The sense of God's nearness gives comfort and courage.

3. *As a righteous judge* (vers. 23, 24). "Do me justice, clear me from aspersion, grant an attestation of my innocence, in the exercise and exhibition of Thine own essential rectitude, and in accordance with that covenant relation which exists between us; and thus in the most effectual manner take away from my malignant enemies all pretext and occasion for exulting in my overthrow, or otherwise triumphing at my expense."—*Alexander*.

Vers. 25, 26. The appeal to God is renewed, showing the necessary result of judgment in the confusion and disgrace of the wicked, and the exaltation of the righteous.

"Here is the eternal result of all the laborious and crafty devices of the Lord's

enemies. God will make little of them, though they magnified themselves. He will shame them for shaming His people, bring them into confusion for making confusion, pull off their fine apparel, and give them a beggarly suit of dishonour, and turn all their rejoicing into weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Truly the saints can afford to wait."—*Spurgeon*.

Vers. 27, 28. "The psalmist is assured of a favourable answer to his appeal, and therefore betakes himself to thanksgiving. 'Let them shout and be glad that delight in my righteousness,' i.e., that desires to see justice done to me. He calls upon his friends, as well as himself, to praise the Lord for the justice of His government."—*Murphy*.

THE RETURN OF PRAYER.

Ver. 13. This word is obscure. Some understand it of posture (1 Kings xviii. 42); others of inward prayer; others of repeated prayer, and others of ineffectual prayer. Perowne says, "I prefer rendering, '*And my prayer, may it return into mine own bosom.*' The prayer I offered for them is a prayer I might have offered for myself. So true a prayer was it, so full of love, that I could wish nothing more than that the blessings I asked for them, should be vouchsafed to me" (cf. Matt. x. 13; Luke x. 6).

Prayer may return in different ways.

I. Unheard. The priests of Baal cried in vain, so with the hypocrite and the formalist; so with the man who prays from hate and not from love.

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below,
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."
—*Shakespeare*.

II. Unanswered. Not that God does not hear, or hearing does not care, or caring cannot help, but that for reasons known to Himself, He withholds what is

asked. Perhaps the time is not come or the petitioner is not fit to receive the blessing, or it may be better to refuse than to grant the request. God gave Israel a king when they wanted one, but it was in His wrath (1. Sam. viii. 7-9); Hos. xiii. 11). God refused to relieve Paul from the thorn in the flesh, though he besought Him thrice, but it was in love. He gave him better than he asked (2 Cor. xii. 9).

III. Bringing benedictions. Others, and ourselves also, are benefited (Job. xlii. 10). Intercessions not only binds us more to God, but brings us nearer our brethren. It is an antidote to selfishness and hate. It fills the heart with love.

"For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain;
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves, and those who call them
friend?"

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."
—*Tennyson*.

BEHAVING AS A FRIEND.

Ver. 14. This implies—

I. Kind consideration. There are differences. All depends on the spirit

(cf. Satan, Job i. 8. and God Ps. xxxi. 7). Mark the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan (Luke x. 30-36).

II. Generous sympathy. Observation without sympathy is torture. But how sweet is true sympathy. It is like cold water to a thirsty soul. It is like balm to a bleeding heart. It is the man who sympathises that can help. Others may be dull, but he is quick to see. Others may stand by silent and powerless, but he knows, as if by intuition, how to speak a word in season. His very presence is an inspiration (*cf.* Job vi. 14; 1 Sam. xxiii. 16).

III. Self-denying service. Love is the essence of friendship. Sacrifice is the highest form of love (*cf.* John xv. 13; 1 John iii. 18; Rom. v. 8). A Moravian missionary sold himself to

slavery, that he might win the love and trust of the slaves. The appeals of others they might scorn, but their hearts were opened to the man who had thus proved himself their friend.

IV. Constancy in love and devotion (Prov. xvii. 17; xxvii. 6; Ps. cxli. 5).

“Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds;

Or bends with the remover to remove.

Oh no! it is an ever fixed mark,

That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;

It is the star of every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height
be taken.”

—*Shakespeare.*

“The noblest friendship ever shown,

The Saviour of the world makes known.”

—*Cowper.*

PSALM XXXVI.

INTRODUCTION.

This psalm was written by David. From ver. 1-4 he describes the rebellious; in vers. 5-9 he extols the various attributes of the Lord; and in vers. 10 and 11 he addresses the Lord in prayer.

THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF A WICKED LIFE.

(Verses 1-4.)

We have in these verses a graphic delineation of a wicked life, in every way true, yet abhorrent. The picture of an ungodly man ought to be enough to save others from an imitation of his profane conduct.

I. A wicked life is characterised by practical atheism. “There is no fear of God before his eyes.”

Wicked men are virtually atheistic. They do not in reality recognise the existence of the Supreme Being, and this is evident from the feeling of their inner nature, from their speech, and from their methods of activity. They are without God in the world. They may recognise Him in the form of a creed, but He has no real influence over them; they are entirely led by the impulse of the moment, by the speculation of the hour, or by the passion of the lower

nature. They are not influenced by considerations that have reference to God and His government of the universe. Prayer forms no part of their lives. A wicked life is not consistent with a true belief in the Divine existence.

II. A wicked life is characterised by self-adulation. “For he flattereth himself in his own eyes.”

Wicked men are generally guilty of self-flattery, and in this way they endeavour to appease their conscience, and approve their plans. Their lives are sinful, and hence they have to cover them with artificial flowers, and with unreal decorations. They dare not admit the facts and experiences of their own heart even to themselves. Self-flattery is easy. It is common. It sometimes has to serve instead of flattery

from others. A wicked life has no cause for self-flattery ; it may pride itself upon its cunning, or upon its success, but that will not alter its guilt, or avert the unerring sentence of infinite Justice.

III. A wicked life is characterised by verbal profanity. "The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit."

Wicked men are recognised by their perverse and profane speech. They hallow not the great name of God, nor do they reverently allude to the solemn realities of the moral life of the race. But their language is not only profane, it is also deceitful. It is characterised by duplicity. It often gives a misrepresentation of moral character, of events and circumstances, and of the ordinary things of life. Speech is a good index to the soul.

IV. A wicked life is characterised by un-wisdom. "He hath left off to be wise and to do good."

Wicked men are often gifted as far as secular knowledge and wisdom are concerned. But true wisdom cometh down from above, and of this they are sadly

deficient. Hence they lack the wisdom that truly makes men wise. Sin is always evidence of the greatest ignorance and folly. The un-wisdom of a wicked life is seen in the pleasure it seeks, in the study it pursues, in the destiny it selects, and in its hatred of philanthropy.

V. A wicked life is characterised by cunning artifices. "He deviseth mischief upon his bed."

The wicked man deliberately plans mischief. His late and early thoughts, which ought to be concentrated on God and His mercy, are fixed on schemes of fraud and cunning. Wicked men are generally cunning. For this they educate their faculties, and thus they hope to enrich themselves, to malign their neighbours, and to defeat the purposes of the good. Thus it is not difficult to know the ungodly man when we meet him.

LESSONS :—1. *That a wicked life is hateful to God.* 2. *That a wicked life is despicable to men.* 3. *That a wicked life is injurious to society.* 4. *That a wicked life may be reformed by grace.*

A WELCOME REVELATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

(Verses 5-12.)

The psalm commences with a description of the character of the wicked man, and, by way of sublime contrast, gives a glad revelation of the character of God. There are grand contrasts in nature; equally so in the inspired volume. Here we have a striking one :—

I. The Divine Being is unspeakable in mercy. "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens."

Mercy is a distinguishing attribute of God. He delighteth in mercy, and has ever proved this in His dealings with the human race. This is evident in the temporal gifts He bestows, in the spiritual good He communicates, and in the grand redemption He has provided for the soul, whereby it can be made free and pure. Nature speaks the mercy of God, as with a thousand tongues, and the Bible lends additional emphasis to

her already loud voice. The greatest sinner may experience the mercy of God if he will only seek it prayerfully.

II. The Divine Being is immutable in rectitude. "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains."

And thus, while mercy is an attribute of God, rectitude may also be predicted of Him. The Divine mercy proceeds upon the principle of Divine equity. The mountains are immutable, they are firm, they are majestic, they are imposing and beautiful ; and so is the rectitude of God. It is ever the same towards rich and poor ; it is worthy the admiration of the intelligent universe, and under its shade men may safely repose. The Divine rectitude should be consoling to the good, and a terror to those who await the unknown tribunal of the future.

III. That the Divine Being invites the confidence of the soul. "Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings."

The mercy and rectitude of God, as seen in the principle of His government and in the preservation of the material universe, awaken men to confidence in Him. And God protects those who put their trust in Him. The figure of this verse is very beautiful and attractive. The soul of man can rest in God by trusting in Him. Faith is moral repose.

IV. That the Divine Being is the source of all life. "For with Thee is the fountain of life."

God is the source of all life. The angels derive their existence from Him. Man lives in Him. All mental, moral, and spiritual life is the gift of the Eternal. Earth has no life to bestow; it is a grave. Life, full and free, is the

gift of the Infinite Being. We should measure the gift by the Giver.

V. That the Divine Being is the protection of the good from the artifices of the wicked. "And let not the hand of the wicked remove me."

The wicked often seek to injure the good by cunning artifice and sheer strength: at such a time God is their only protection and refuge. Hence we have here a very glad and welcome representation of the Divine character: full of mercy, firm in justice, inviting the confidence of the soul, the source of life, and the protection of the good. What more can we require?

LESSONS:—1. *We ought to be grateful that God has given such a condescending revelation of Himself.* 2. *We ought to be consoled and strengthened by the thought that such a revelation is true to human experience.* 3. *Learn a lesson of trust in the Eternal God.*

PSALM XXXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

This psalm was probably written by David in his old age, and contains his experience in reference to the providential dealings of God with men. It acknowledges the transient prosperity of the wicked, but places in sublime contrast therewith the confidence and destiny of the good, and proves clearly that the latter have little cause to envy the former. It is folly to envy a man because he is clothed in the garb of a king; he may, after all, be only a pauper in disguise.

THE TRANSIENT PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED UNWORTHY THE ENVY OF THE GOOD.

(Verses 1, 2.)

I. That there is apparently much in the prosperity of the wicked to excite the fretful envy of the good.

It cannot be denied that wicked men are often in great prosperity even while the pious are poor and despised. They are eminent in social position and fortunate in commercial speculation; hence they are surrounded by all that heart could wish. This is a matter of history. It is also a matter of everyday experience. In this life the wicked are prosperous. They live for this life alone, they are often cunning and selfish; hence it is not to be wondered at

that they succeed in it. And they always take good care to display their grandeur, so that it may be universally seen and admired. Hence they are the occasion of perplexity to the good, and often of desponding thoughts and envious feelings. It is hard to understand how it is that so many good things should fall to the lot of characters so unworthy of them, while the children of God are in comparative need. At such a sight it is difficult to realise that Heaven is just in its providential dealings with men. But this thought will come with devotion (Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17).

II. That it is foolish to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it is only of temporary duration.

It is impossible not to regard the temporary prosperity of the wicked; the good cannot be indifferent to it; it is thrust upon their attention. But the good are not obliged to envy it, or to be ill-tempered at it. Their envy will do no good. It will not alter things, or make them better. This social condition is permitted by Heaven. It must, therefore, be accepted by the devout mind as appropriate, as a token of the beneficence of God in that He will permit such distinguished mercy to attend a wicked life. But the prosperity of the wicked will only be transient, as the beauty of the grass, or as the momentary bloom of the flower. And, therefore, it is not worthy of envy, as it is prosperity of the lowest kind, and will soon wither in the grave; whereas, though the good may endure a long period of want, yet it will only be as a prelude to the eternal wealth and enjoyment of heaven. Surely, then, they have no need to envy the temporal prosperity of the wicked.

III. That it is sinful to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it is contrary to the command of God.

The Bible clearly reveals the fact that envy is a sinful passion, and that it is the outcome of an impure heart. A good man cannot indulge envy, or he will soon be little better in moral character than those whose prosperity he may contemplate. Envy is forbidden by God. It is an unhallowed flame within the soul. It hinders prayer. It leads to oppression. It is contrary to

the example of Christ. Hence if good men would keep their souls in harmony with the law of God; if they would be contented in spirit and happy in life, they must not yield to the dire sentiment of envy.

IV. That it is injurious to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it awakens the lower sentiments of the soul.

There is no lower passion of which man is capable than that of envy. It is a mean and unhappy companion. It looks askance at every one it meets. In its light a friend may be turned into an enemy. And for a good man to give himself up to it, would indeed be to allow the lower feelings of his soul to gain the mastery over all that is true and magnanimous within him. A pure soul cannot indulge envy.

V. That it is presumptuous to envy the prosperity of the wicked, because it is rebellion against the providence of God.

God has a certain method of providence in the universe, and it ill becomes good men to rebel against it. It is just. It is disciplinary. It will ultimately be adjusted to all the moral requirements of the universe. The good should therefore be patient, not fretful. They can afford to wait. They have moral prosperity, they need not therefore envy secular pride. They must fall in with the providence of God, even though at times it may be of difficult interpretation.

LESSONS:—1. *Not to cultivate an envious outlook upon the social conditions of men.* 2. *To trust in God during the enigmas of the present, and wait the final adjustment of all things.*

THE DISPOSITIONS AND BENEDICTIONS OF THE GOOD.

(Verses 3-11.)

In the opening verses of this psalm we are told of the dispositions which should and should not characterise a pious soul. It should not be fretful or envious. It should be trustful. It should be joyous. It should be meek. These dispositions win the benediction of Heaven. The blessings of the soul

are intimately allied to its moral dispositions. Men find the world what they make it by their own inner spirit.

I. The dispositions that should characterise a godly life. 1. *Trust.* "Trust in the Lord." If men would avoid a fretful spirit, they should trust in the Lord. Faith is the noblest dis-

position of the soul, and is an antidote for envy. It has an elevating influence upon the moral character of those who exercise it. The Lord is worthy of the confidence of men. He is omnipotent, and cannot fail. He is faithful, and will never forsake. The good may therefore confide their life, temporal circumstances, their reputation, and the government of the universe to Him, knowing that He will order all for their ultimate spiritual welfare. Trust not in man, not even in yourself. Trust in God must also be followed by appropriate effort; only they who "do good" have any right to expect Divine help.

2. *Joy.* "Delight thyself also in the Lord." Hence the joy of the good is not carnal and sinful, but spiritual and pure. It is delight in the Supreme Being, in His character and perfections, in the noblest love, and in the highest wisdom; hence it is eminently real and secure. In what better object can the soul delight? In uncertain riches? In fleeting pleasure? In dying friendship? The joy of the Lord is our strength both in sorrow and in service. God delights in the good, and what more reasonable than that they should rejoice in Him. The life of the Christian is one of holy delight in the Eternal. Faith inspires delight.

3. *Devotion.* "Commit thy way unto the Lord." The good are not to take the sole guidance and responsibility of their own life. They are to commit their way, their sorrow, their moral imperfections, their mental perplexities, their domestic cares, and their temporal circumstances, entirely into the hands of the Lord. They are to do this by prayer, with faith, in delight. In this consists true piety. Though the great God has the vast concerns of the universe to watch over, He is willing to direct the individual life committed to His care. Some men commit their way unto reason; some to impulse; and some to passion. But God is the only true guardian of the way of an immortal soul.

4. *Rest.* "Rest in the Lord." This is the duty and privilege of the good. This is not a world for much repose;

men are anxious and active; they make haste to be rich; they pursue pleasure ardently; they are tormented by care; they are unrestful. But religion gives moral quietude. It calms the soul. It silences the voice of complaint. God is the only true resting-place of the soul; but what a sweet rest is found in Him! See, then, the accompaniments of faith, joy, devotion, rest. Faith bears blessed fruit.

5. *Patience.* "Wait patiently." The good must be patient in suffering, in service—under adverse circumstances, when their reputation is maligned, and when the mystery of life presses heavily upon them. God is worth waiting for. His time is the best. Men tarry for the king. Time should not be considered in waiting for the King of heaven. The splendour of His advent will more than compensate for the delay.

6. *Meekness.* "But the meek shall inherit the earth." The good should be meek and contented with their lot, not haughty, defiant, or restless. Hence we see the dispositions which should characterise a pious soul, and the benedictions they attain, and the admiration they win.

II. The benedictions that are bestowed upon a godly life. 1. *That a godly life is watched over by the beneficent providence of God.* "Thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." The Divine providence enables the good to feel at home in this world, even though they do not regard it as their home. They dwell in the land because it is the property of their Father in heaven, and He gives them the right to reside in it. Thus their temporal and moral requirements will be met. They will be fed with the bread that perisheth, as also with the bread that cometh down from heaven. Truth is the sustenance of the soul, and it shall never be lacking to the good.

2. *That a godly life is privileged by the gratification of its best desires.* "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." The desires of the good are the outcome of their trust and delight in the Lord, and therefore may safely be granted. Man is a creature of desire. He often

longs for that he can never attain. His aspirations are often ambitious, and, if realised, would prove injurious. But the inclinations of the good are pure and spiritual, they are in harmony with the will of God and the welfare of the soul. Religion alone can give true satisfaction to human desire.

3. *That a godly life shall be vindicated from the slander and calumny of men.* "And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light." The good are often maligned in this world by those who envy the beauty of their characters and the glory of their reputation. Sometimes this is the outcome of sheer malice, and occasionally of wanton mischief. But from the darkness of calumny God will bring the good into the light of day, when men shall see the untarnished beauty of their characters, the injury that has been done them, and the tender solicitude of Heaven for the public vindication of the pure.

4. *That a godly life is enriched by a true ownership of the earth.* "But the meek shall inherit the earth." The world is not inherited by the busy or by

those who are given to speculation, but by the meek. They inherit it by their contented spirit, and because they enjoy it. It is the gift of their Father to them, and they possess its title-deeds in Christ. The meek are the true and permanent inheritors of the soil; they will inherit the new heaven and the new earth.

5. *That a godly life shall experience a sweet and affluent peace.* "And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." A godly life is generally characterised by peacefulness. It is at peace with self, with God, and with the universe. Its peace is affluent; it is a delight; it is divinely given to the pure. "My peace I give unto you." Weak men are agitated by the storms of earth, while good men know the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and anticipate a destiny of peace which shall never be broken by sorrow or sin.

LESSONS:—1. *To cultivate the dispositions of soul commended by God.* 2. *To expect the benedictions of Heaven promised to a trustful soul.*

THE PLOTTINGS OF THE WICKED AGAINST THE GOOD.

(Verses 12-15.)

That the wicked plot against the just is matter of history, and also of everyday experience. They envy the moral character of the good, with the respect it wins and the influence it wields. They cannot interpret its inner meaning or understand the secret of its modest power. They are also rebuked by the quiet dignity of the Christian character, and hence, through sheer hatred, seek to persecute and remove it out of their sight. To this end they employ their best genius and cunning, and await the result with the utmost complacency, little thinking that Heaven holds them and their schemes in derision.

I. *The plottings of the wicked against the good are wrathful.* "And gnasheth upon him with his teeth." The wicked show by their gestures the rage they indulge against, and injury they would inflict upon, the good if it

were in their power. They gnash with their teeth, thus indicating their angry but curbed rage. They have not the ability or the opportunity to accomplish the mischief their violent passion would devise. Sinners are held in check by the restraining providence of God, by legal penalties, and often by the sheer force of public opinion, which favours the welfare of the good. But if the wicked cannot always execute their plottings against the just, they do not disguise their anger; they little think how morally impotent and vulgar their puny gnashing makes them appear. They show that they are the creatures of a passion they cannot vent.

II. *The plottings of the wicked against the good are cruel.* "The wicked have drawn out the sword." They have drawn the weapon out of the sheath and await the time to use it.

They do not seek to overcome the just by Scripture truth, by logical argument, or by cultured means, but by the cruel and deadly instrument of war. They employ no half measures, as they vainly imagine. They repose more confidence in the physical and material agency than in the intellectual and the moral. In seeking the injury of the good, they would prefer a sword to any other instrumentality. They shrink not from murder if their rage can only achieve its malicious design. They are of the lowest type of mind.

III. The plottings of the wicked against the good are determined. "And have bent their bow." They not merely carry a sword, but also a bow; nor would they refuse any other instrument likely to accomplish their mischievous design upon the good. They bend the bow with all the determination of will they can possibly summon. They take steady aim that they may wound a vital part. And thus the wicked, in their plottings against the just, make use of all the instrumentalities they can command, exercise all the talents they possess, and are strong in their determination to achieve the end they contemplate.

IV. The plottings of the wicked against the good are cowardly. "To cast down the poor and needy." The wicked do not seek to engage in conflict with the strong amongst the good, who

would be competent to expose and vanquish their plottings, but with the poor and needy. They attack the feeble who are too meek in spirit to suspect their mischief, or to defend themselves from it; they attack the poor who have not wherewith to protect themselves from the assaults of their imperious enemies. Wicked men are generally cowardly. They have not the courage of their rage, or the valour of their determination.

V. The plottings of the wicked against the good are self-destructive. "Their sword shall enter into their own heart." The very weapon intended for the destruction of the good, under the mysterious but retributive arrangements of Divine Providence, shall be employed in the defeat of the wicked. The wicked are often hung upon gallows built by themselves. Their plottings are self-destructive; they are vain; they are useless; their bows are broken; their agencies are cut off; their plans are defeated; they outwit themselves; they invite the derision and retribution of heaven.

LESSONS:—1. *That it is foolish for the wicked to plot against the good.* **2.** *Such plottings are intelligible to the good, being explained by the enmity of the world to Christ.* **3.** *Such plottings are not to be feared, but are to be outlived by trust in God.*

THE RIGHTEOUS AND HIS LITTLE BETTER THAN THE WICKED WITH HIS MUCH.

(Verse 16.)

It is a fact of everyday observation that the righteous often have little, while the ungodly have much. The little may be better than the much. This is the arithmetic of Heaven, not of the world. Why is the little better?

I. Because it is honestly gained. The little that a righteous man hath is sure to be honestly gained. It will be either the product of healthy labour, of commendable skill, or of lawful inheritance. This cannot always be said of the riches of the wicked; they are often got by fraud, by cunning, from the orphan,

and the widow. The way in which wealth is obtained has much to do with its real value.

II. Because it may be safely retained. The little that a righteous man hath is far more likely to be safely retained than are the riches of the wicked. The former are careful in the use, prayerful in the investment, and unselfish in the gift of their little; while the latter are spendthrift, godless, and selfish in the use of their much. Prayer and benevolence are a great preservative to wealth.

III. Because it may be truly enjoyed. The little of the righteous is rightfully earned, and, therefore, may be truly enjoyed; whereas the much of the wicked is often unjustly gained, and is, therefore, associated with unhappy deeds, with unwelcome memories, with self-accusation, and with a fear of retribution. It cannot be truly enjoyed.

IV. Because it will be carefully spent. It is just possible that the little of the righteous will go farther than the great riches of the wicked. The righteous are careful but not miserly; they gather up the fragments that nothing may be lost. The wicked are often speculative, and lose more than they win. They are spendthrifts; they make a boast of their prodigality; they are well blest by flatterers and by sinful accomplices.

V. Because it will be benevolently used. The little of the righteous will be given to the Lord; to His cause on the earth; to His poor; and to institutions worthy of help. Men lose nothing by giving to the prophet of the Lord (1 Kings xvii. 14; Prov. xi. 24). The righteous gain by giving. The wicked lose by withdrawing. A running stream inherits the most territory.

VI. Because it will be divinely blessed. The righteous can justly expect the blessing of God upon their little, because it is honestly gained and it is benevolently used. The wicked have no right to anticipate the benediction of Heaven upon their riches. No man is rich without the blessing of God.

LESSONS:—1. *To be satisfied with little.* 2. *To make little sufficient.* 3. *To use little well.*

CONTRASTED CHARACTERS.

(Verses 16-28.)

We have in these verses a fine contrast between the wicked and the righteous. It is drawn by unerring skill, after minute observation, and is in keeping with the general experience of mankind. The wicked and the good:—

I. They are contrasted in their possessions. “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.” The wicked often have greater property and wealth than the good, but they are not content therewith; yea, they are even unrestful in its possession. Whereas the righteous have little, but, by the quietude of their soul, their little becomes much, and is a true enjoyment to them. Wicked men are troubled by their much (Luke xii. 16). Good men are grateful for their little (Ps. ciii. 2).

II. They are contrasted in their strength. “For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous.” The arms are a token of power and strength, and the arms of the wicked shall be broken. They shall be broken by the retributive providence of God, and by the failure of their own schemes. What a pitiable

sight they present! Revengeful, yet armless. Like Samson shorn of his strength. The strength of the good man does not consist in his arms, hence there is no reference to them, but in the inspiring energy of God. He is upheld by the Lord, hence his superior power and safety.

III. They are contrasted in their perpetuity. “The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be for ever.” “But the wicked shall perish.” The good are known by God. He knows their present estate and their future glory. He sees their trials, and also the weight of glory in reserve for them. He beholds the sword unsheathed, and the bow bent against them, but no weapon formed against them can prosper. The times of the good are in the hand of the Lord, hence He will deliver them from special calamities, and will feed them when famine is prevalent. But the wicked shall perish,—they have no defence against their enemies, they have no granary in Egypt to which they can flee in the days of famine. They will perish ignobly, irreparably, and eternally.

This will be the end of their hatred, cunning, and wealth.

IV. They are contrasted in their integrity. "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again : but the righteous showeth mercy and giveth." Though the wicked have great wealth, they are often under the necessity of borrowing money, because they are prodigal. They borrow to meet the demands of extravagant habits, of sinful pleasures, and of accomplices in vices. Sin is very expensive. It involves in hopeless debt, and oftentimes to those against whom the sword has been unsheathed. The wicked pay not again. They are not willing to reform their extravagant habits, they are not willing to work, and they are dishonest at heart, and so they pay not their debts, even though they violate their most sacred bonds. The righteous lend to the wicked, they are merciful and generous in spirit. Their wealth was lent to them, and they are willing to lend it again, and to receive their usury from Him who ever rewards

a beneficent deed. The plottings of the wicked do not interrupt the benevolent dispositions of the good. It is better to lend than to borrow.

V. They are contrasted in their posterity. "Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. But the seed of the wicked shall be cut off." David had not seen the seed of the righteous begging bread. He was a king, and would not be likely to meet with such poverty. Yet his experience was wide in the matter, and he was competent to pass an opinion. The children of good men are seen begging ; but very seldom. This is the exception, the rule is in harmony with the statement of this verse. The children of the wicked are cut off, they inherit from their parents the seeds of destruction (Prov. iii. 33).

LESSONS:—1. *Which character is the more inviting, the more prosperous, the more enduring?* 2. *Which will you cultivate?*

THE RIGHTEOUS.

(Verses 29-34.)

The psalmist found congenial employment in writing about good men, and their relation to God, to His government, and to the world at large. He delighted to show the Divine care for the good, their excellencies of character, the protection they enjoyed, and the future they anticipated. The righteous:

I. The land he inherits. "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever." The righteous inherit the earth, the world in which they now are, they inherit it as the sons of God through Christ, and, standing on Calvary, all that they can see from that hill is theirs. They will dwell eternally in this world by the work they do, by the influences they exert, by the inspiration they impart, and by the silent testimony they leave behind (Heb. xi. 4).

II. The wisdom he speaks. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment." Good men are known by their speech,

they talk on good subjects, and talk on them wisely. He converses about moral questions, his tongue talketh of judgment. He speaks not about the follies of the age, he has no interest in the gossip of the weak,—he prefers the deeper and more solemn themes of life and destiny.

III. The law he keeps. "The law of his God is in his heart ; none of his steps shall slide." This is the secret of his wise speech. Men who know God, and who search His law, are furnished with themes for noble conversation, and are imbued with a true spirit of wisdom. If men would read the Bible more, they would talk more wisely. The good man not merely reads the law, he not merely knows it, but it is resident within him as a vital and transformative principle (Ps. cxix. 11). Obedience to this law is elevating, preserving, safe, and sanctifying. It is the highest law, and obedience to it is the most influential and worthy.

IV. The safety he enjoys. "The

wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand." The righteous are watched by deceptive and cruel men, they are often unconconscious of this peril. But they have another watcher, even the Lord who is their Sun and Shield. The Divine Guardian is greater and more vigilant than the human foe. Jesus was watched by His enemies.

V. The condemnation he escapes. "Nor condemn him when he is judged." In this world the righteous are often condemned, by secret slander, by cruel hatred, by violent plots, by public opinion, and even by the legal tribunals of the land. But there comes a day when their condemnation will be reversed, their shame will be removed, their characters will be cleared, and infinite justice will receive them into its eternal protection. The good can afford to wait this time, and no doubt many long for it to turn their darkness into light, their sadness into joy. A false sentence is now passed on moral good-

ness; the future will reveal its injustice. The pure life only can escape condemnation. What a joy to escape the condemnation of God, not through our own merit, but through the cross of Jesus.

VI. The exaltation he expects. "Wait on the Lord and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land." The good are to wait on the Lord, because He may be long in coming to them, because He is worth waiting for, and because at His coming they will realise all their long-cherished hopes. The early watchers on the mountain wait for the rising of the sun, and the multitudes wait for the coming of the king. So let the Christian wait for the Lord. The good must not only wait on the Lord, but also keep His way. There must be keeping as well as waiting, and then there will be inheriting. Canaan is the inheritance and the exaltation of the pure.

LESSONS:—1. *Talk wisely.* 2. *Obey diligently.* 3. *Walk carefully.* 4. *Anticipate joyfully.*

THE TEMPORARY PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED AS CONTRASTED WITH THE PEACEFUL DESTINY OF THE GOOD.

(Verses 35-37.)

The first verse contains the pith of the entire psalm. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity." The following reasons are given as a preventative of an envious spirit: The glory of the wicked is of brief duration (ver. 2); the moral rectitude of the good will be finally manifested (ver. 6); the good are divinely protected from the attacks of evil men (ver. 12-15); they are divinely guided (ver. 23); they are the true inheritors of the soil (ver. 29); their destiny is peaceful. Hence the good have no need to envy the wicked in their bright but transient prosperity, especially when they consider the future. Perhaps, when David wrote this psalm, the image of Saul was floating before his vision. Truly, in reference to that monarch, he could say, "I have seen the wicked," &c.

I. That wicked men are often in the possession of great power. "I have seen the wicked in great power."

1. *They often have social distinction.* It very often happens that the wicked are rich; they have a productive farm, or a good business, which places at their command the luxuries of life. Hence they are surrounded by men of like fortunes, and are largely courted by the multitude beneath them. It is customary in these times to make wealth rather than character the test of companionship; hence rich men are suns in the firmament of our social life, they are surrounded by attendant planets, and stars, hoping to catch the rays of their favour. They keep up appearances, they give grand entertainments, they aid philanthropic institutions, and so gain social popularity. Such men are dangerous. They are, to those who circle near them,

as the bright light to the moth : they occasion moral ruin.

2. *They often have national distinction.* They have gained influence in the local circle in which they move, hence they are elevated to a seat in the legislature ; or, it may be, that they are *clever* as they are wicked, and thus, by sheer intellect, gain the pre-eminence of their fellows. They make an invention, they write a book, they win a battle, and society, not being in an ideal state, is in danger of elevating genius rather than goodness. Again, if they are not clever, they are *cunning*, and we all know the power of fraud to out-do honesty for a time. They flatter the great men of the age, and so win their help to fame. For even great men are wonderfully open to flattery. But, sometimes their plots are so deeply laid, that even the good are duped by them.

3. *The supremacy of the wicked is a matter of history and experience.* "I have seen," &c. History is a record of the wicked who have been in great power. Human society exhibits the same fact. Men of the highest genius, whose names are household words, and whose works will be read to the end of time, are illustrations of this statement. We think of Byron ; and also of many kings who have ascended our throne. This outlook upon history and society may be perplexing, but the problem will one day be solved, when it will appear that saints were the true kings of the world, and that ambitious sinners were its paupers.

4. *In this supremacy the wicked appear strong and arrogant.* "Spreading himself," &c. They imagine that their foundation is secure, that the effects of their wealth and genius upon the popular mind will never die away ; that their smile will win, that their frown will subdue their enemies. Their demeanour is imperious. Their tones of voice are emphatic. They forget that modesty and humility would best serve their end. They are like the swollen stream, which spreads itself throughout the land, to show off its expansiveness, but certainly not its depth.

II. *That wicked men often experience unexpected reverses.* 1. *Severe and complete.* "Yet he passed away."

Sometimes these men pass from the highest pinnacle of wealth to abject poverty, through speculation or panic ; their true characters are unveiled, and society discards them. No vestige is left of their power.

2. *Unlikely and unexpected.* Such reverses are not often anticipated. We expect that wealth will protect from them. The wicked are like the rider through the desert, unexpectedly plundered by some stern robber. At the roots of the richest flower there may be an insect eating away its life unseen. The calm often breaks suddenly into storm. The wicked aristocrat may soon become the wicked pauper.

3. *Minutely observed.* "I sought him." Men of wealth are talked about by everybody ; their houses, clothes, habits, are the staple theme of the neighbourhood. "I sought him." Men come to the ruin to mock ; to search to see if there was anything left they could plunder, and, no doubt, to weep. Some would pity his fall. The world soon hears of the destruction of its powerful ones.

III. *That while the wicked experience these reverses, the good are happy in their life, and peaceful in their futurity.* "The end of that man is peace." 1. *The good are a great contrast to the wicked just contemplated.* The character of the one is impure, that of the other is holy ; the circumstances of the one are affluent, those of the other may be needy ; the destiny of the one is ignominious, while that of the other is happy. The contrast is not only great, but *happy*. It is pleasant to turn from the one to the other. Good men are the charm of history and of life. They are welcome as the shady nook during the hot summer day. The contrast is *solemn*. To think of the wicked in their power and ruin, and then of the good in their peace and hope, must certainly evoke a feeling of regret that one life should lack the beauty and safety of the other.

2. *The good are worthy of careful note and imitation.* "Mark the perfect man." He is worthy of note. *A perfect man !* Are you astonished ? Have

you never seen one? True, they are not often to be met with,—you should therefore note him the more when you do see him. If you go into a picture gallery, and find a beautiful work of art, you study it from every point of view, its every feature and tint. So with the flower in your garden. But here is not a lifeless picture, a withering flower, but an immortality,—therefore let your study be deeper and truer. Mark his moral bearing, his strict integrity, his untiring zeal, his gentle spirit, his effort for the good of others. But do not look at him merely to admire, but to *imitate*; not merely that the natural instincts of your soul may be pleased, but that your manhood may catch the glory of his. Men always become like the object they study. Moral character is the highest kind of study. If you mark the perfect man you will see that life does not always go easily with him; sometimes the night is dark and rough, but he always has one star to cheer and guide him on his journey.

3. *The life of the good will ultimately*

come to an end. “The end of that man.” What a pity! We should like their beautiful light to shine on in our midst for ever. Good men are the world’s jewels; they are patterns of life; they are prayers; they are inspirations. We cannot spare them. But death is rude, and takes them from us; they gladly step into heaven. And thus are plucked earth’s choicest flowers, to be removed to the Eden above.

4. *The departure of the good will be peaceful in its issue.* There may be the pain of disease, but that only touches the surface of the man. In the depths of his soul there is celestial calm. Peace, the end of life! How welcome after the storm. “Come at last, has it?” exclaims the dying saint. “Peace!” “My spirit has found its rest in the home of the Eternal.” We are told that Stephen fell asleep; God turned the angry cries of the murderous mob into the lullabies of a saintly repose.

WHICH WILL YOU HAVE? 1. *Wickedness and power*; or, 2. *Piety and peace.*

PSALM XXXVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

This is a psalm of David to call to remembrance his past life, and, no doubt, has especial reference to his sin with Bathsheba. It calls up to the view of his memory the sins of the past, the afflictions of the past, the enemies of the past, and the mercies of the past. It is well to have times of remembrance in life, like milestones on the road, to remind of the journey we have travelled, and to inspire us onward to the future. The past is not entirely to be forgotten; it is to be called up as evidence of our own depravity, of the Divine faithfulness, and as a profitable moral reflection for the soul.

A CONSCIENCE AWAKENED BY A SENSE OF THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENT.

(Verses 1-22.)

I. **That the Divine chastisement is greatly afflictive to men.** This is evident throughout the entire psalm; in fact, it would appear as though the writer were unable to find similitude by which to liken, or language in which to express, his moral pain occasioned by the Divine chastisement.

1. *The Divine chastisement makes men apprehensive of the wrath of God* (ver. 1). David, no doubt, felt that he justly merited the Divine rebuke in its mood

of strong displeasure. He had sinned, and sin always leads men to regard God as offended. It changes the Divine favour into disapprobation. The soul is certain to view God through its own moral experiences, and hence, according to its consciousness of innocence or guilt, He appears as a Father or as a Judge. The Divine anger is the bitterest element in the sorrow of the good.

2. *The Divine chastisement is keen in*

its penetration into the soul of man (ver. 2). The Divine chastisements are keen, swift, and penetrating as barbed arrows. They are shot unseen; they come unexpected; they make little noise; they are abiding in their injury. Thus it is with those who are convinced of sin. The arrow of the Holy Spirit penetrates to their innermost soul, and causes terrible pain of conscience. God's arrows always hit their mark, and are intended to remind of the bitterness of sin.

3. *The Divine chastisement makes men morally loathsome to themselves* (vers. 3 and 5). Here we see the view which an awakened conscience takes of its moral condition. When the soul is wounded by sin it becomes offensive to its own inner gaze. The sinner, when under conviction by the Spirit of God, sees all his life as one festering sore, and loathes it with penitential grief.

4. *The Divine chastisement leads men to an overwhelming consciousness of sin* (ver. 4). A man, when under the rebuke of God, feels himself to be overwhelmed in the sea of his sins. There is no human refuge for him. No light reaches him. The number of man's sins are an index to the woe of the Divine chastisements. If the sins were not deep the rebuke would not be so loud. Sin is a heavy burden, and if not cast upon the Lord, will sink the sinner into perdition.

5. *The Divine chastisement leads men into grievous unrest* (vers. 3-8). The Divine chastisement penetrates to the inner being of man, even to the bones, and causes unrest. The good in this condition are like a ship in the storm. There can be no quietude of soul where there is sin. An awakened conscience can only obtain peace in Christ, who is the Prince of peace.

6. *The Divine chastisement divests life of all human joy* (ver. 10).

II. *That the Divine chastisement often tests the sincerity and worth of human friendship.* "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore, and my kinsmen stand afar off (ver. 11).

1. *The Divine chastisement tests the sincerity of human friendship.* Friends,

who are thick as eagles on a carcase while the feast lasts, are scarce in that neighbourhood when the repast is over. When the devil divested Job of his property, he also relieved him of his imagined friends. When men are undergoing the Divine chastisement they are generally left in loneliness. Then companions fear lest they should share the woe of their afflicted comrade. They stand aghast at the reversed condition of things. At such times relatives are false to the natural affection they ought to bear toward their brother in adversity. Our Lord was forsaken by His disciples. Only true friendship survives the test of adversity.

2. *The Divine chastisement generally stimulates the cunning policy of the wicked* (ver. 12). And thus it often happens that in the hour of Divine chastisement inward grief of soul is combined with outward exigencies. When wicked men see the good in trouble then they consider it a favourable time for executing their hellish schemes. They are unmerciful; they are cowardly; their strength is in stealth; they are malicious; they are ever active; they promote slander; they delight in lies. God only can defeat their cunning devices.

3. *The Divine chastisement leads men to examine the moral tendency of their lives* (vers. 17, 18). Here the Psalmist acknowledges the moral weakness of his life, in that he is ready to halt in despair. He also confesses his sin without reservation of thought or language. Thus the Divine chastisement revealed him to himself in no pleasing light. David reviews his life in its inner meaning and in its public bearing, and intimates that his enemies accuse him falsely. Sorrow makes men review all their social and moral relationships.

III. *The Divine chastisements call into requisition the self-restraint of the good.* "But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth" (vers. 13, 14). David was silent, notwithstanding the strong provocations of his enemies. He probably knew that it would be but little use to contend with them by words, and that if he did, he would only arouse

them to fiercer anger. Hence he manifests the wisdom of silence. It is generally wise to treat angry and slanderous men with silence. Silence is the language of dignified innocence. It is a token of noble self-control. Man has the ability to subdue his natural feelings when they are unduly excited by cruel enemies. Christ answered his accusers not a word. It is the token of a strong soul that it can bear slander and persecution in silence, only seeking the Divine vindication and protection.

IV. That the Divine chastisements awaken the repentant soul to importunate prayer. "Forsake me not, O Lord. O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation" (vers. 21, 22). Thus, if David was silent toward men, he was

not silent toward God, and in trouble it is far better to pray to God than to talk to men. Prayer enables men to be self-contained. David said that, if Heaven forsook him, he would indeed be friendless. The Divine Companionship is the protection of the good from all the plottings of wicked men. Adverse circumstances awaken men to earnest prayer—to prayer which is soon triumphant in its experience of the salvation of God.

LESSONS:—1. *How many are afflicted by the chastisements of Heaven.* 2. *How many are left companionless by the sorrows of life.* 3. *How many are driven to devotion by anguish of heart.* 4. *How the mischief of the wicked may be turned by God to the good of the prayerful.*

PSALM XXXIX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief musician, to Jeduthun, a psalm of David." *Jeduthun* was one of the leaders of the sacred music in the time of David (1 Chron. xvi. 41, 42; xxv. 6; 2 Chron. xxxv. 15). *Jeduthun* is also the title of one of the twenty-four musical choirs left by David. As the psalm is addressed to the chief musician, it was obviously intended for use in the public worship of the tabernacle. David is said to be the author of the psalm. The particular occasion to which it refers is unknown. But from the psalm itself, it is clear that it was written in a time of doubt and trouble, when the psalmist's thoughts were of such a character that he could not express them without injury to others and to the cause of God. We have no means of determining what the particular trouble was from which David was suffering. Matthew Henry suggests that "perhaps it was the death of some dear friend or relation that was the trial of his patience, and that suggested to him these meditations of mortality; and at the same time, it should seem too, he himself was weak and ill, and under some prevailing distemper." Hengstenberg thinks that the psalm was written "when in hot persecution and violent conflict." It is clear that the Psalmist was in affliction and trouble, and his mind seems to have been sorely exercised as to the Divine dealings. He could not see the wisdom, the benevolence, or the justice of some of the Divine arrangements. He had dark and painful thoughts on the matter, which he dare not utter. And at length he is compelled to seek relief in prayer. Homiletically we divide the psalm thus,—Silence in Trouble (vers. 1-3; Speech in Trouble (vers. 4-6); Supplication in Trouble (vers. 7-13).

SILENCE IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 1-3.)

We have here presented to our consideration:—

I. *Silence maintained in trouble.* "I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue," &c. (vers. 1, 2).

1. *God's providential dealings, as seen by us, sometimes occasion doubt and trouble to good men.* The Psalmist ap-

pears greatly perplexed as to the Divine administration of human affairs. He saw so much grief and pain in life, apparently proceeding from the hand of God, he was himself being consumed by the blow of God's hand, and life itself was so short and vain, that he could not see the benevolence of the dealings of God with him. The

providence of God has occasioned much perplexity and doubt in the minds of good men. Asaph was sorely tried at one time by some of its problems (Ps. lxxiii.). We all have passed through experiences which at the time seemed utterly irreconcilable with the wisdom and love of God, and unbelieving and painful thoughts and feelings have filled our mind and heart. At such times we shall do well to remember that we see only a very small portion of His ways, and that small portion we see but dimly. Moreover, bitter experiences often lead to richest blessings.

2. *The expression of such doubt and trouble in the presence of the wicked is to be avoided as evil.* By the utterance of the sceptical and hard thoughts of God which filled his mind, the Psalmist would probably have confirmed the wicked in their unbelief, and encouraged them in their rebellion against God. Asaph felt that if he spake of his mental difficulties, and announced the dark conclusions which suggested themselves to him, he should thereby injure the true children of God. "If I say I will speak thus; behold, I should offend the generation of Thy children." We are not at liberty to express our doubts, if, by so doing, we should give the wicked an occasion to blaspheme the Holy One, or if we should unsettle the faith of any sincere believer in God.

3. *The good man guards against this evil by maintaining silence.* "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue," &c. A soul resolutely maintaining silence, lest by speech another should be injured, is surely a brave and beautiful sight. "What a strange power," says Emerson, "there is in silence! How many resolutions are formed, how many sublime conquests effected, during that pause when the lips are closed, and the soul secretly feels the eye of her Maker upon her! When some of those cutting, sharp, blighting words have been spoken which send the hot indignant blood to the face and head, if those to whom they are addressed keep silence, look on with awe, for a mighty work is going on within them, and the spirit of evil, or their

guardian angel, is very near to them in that hour. During that pause they have made a step toward heaven or toward hell, and an item has been scored in the book which the day of judgment shall see opened. They are the strong ones of the earth, the mighty food for good or evil, those who know how to keep silence when it is a pain and a grief to them; those who give time to their own souls to wax strong against temptation, or to the powers of wrath to stamp upon them their withering passage." The good man is ready to speak, when by his speech he can help the faith of others. He says, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." He is "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear." But if by his speech he should incur the risk of imperilling the faith or peace of a believing soul, or of hardening the wicked in his wickedness, then he resolutely keeps silent. The silence of the Psalmist *required effort*. He put a muzzle upon his mouth. It is a pity that some of the weaklings, who so glibly prate about their doubts, and parade their so-called religious difficulties, would not try to imitate the Psalmist in this respect. But the Psalmist was a strong man, while the majority of those who exhibit their mental and religious difficulties as a sign of a superior order of mind, are the very reverse. The soul that has agonised with real doubts on the most vital and momentous questions will be silent concerning such doubts, or speak of them in such a manner and to such auditors only as will at least derive no harm from his speech.

II. *Silence increasing trouble.* We adopt Hengstenberg's rendering of the second verse. "I grew dumb and was still; I was silent, not for good, and my pain was stirred." He explains it thus, "The Psalmist says he had indeed executed his purpose, declared in the preceding verse, but that ill had thereby accrued. The obstinate and constrained silence, so far from producing good, had rather made his pain rise to a frightful magnitude." All great emotions require

expression. They must have utterance, or the over-taxed brain will reel into madness, and the over-charged heart will burst. Sometimes great emotions find utterance in *poetry*. We have many instances of this in these Psalms. Prose is all too hard and cold for the expression of intense emotions. The grief-stricken spirit pours out its sorrows in plaintive minor strains, and the jubilant soul hymns its gladness in some triumphant "*Gloria in excelsis*," or *Jubilate*. Yet words the most intensely poetical in significance and arrangement not unfrequently fail to express the soul's emotion. Very often great emotions find utterance in *tears*. When words fail to express our deep grief or thrilling joy, tears often come to our relief. "They are the safety-valves of the heart, when too much pressure is laid on." "They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

"Sweet tears! the awful language eloquent
Of infinite affection, far too big
For words."
—POLLOCK.

Thus tears relieve the soul when surcharged with sorrow or o'erburdened by some great joy. But great emotions may always find relief in *prayer*. No sorrow is too great or too sacred for us to utter it to the ear of God. We may speak our highest, holiest, joy to Him. And the dark and agonising doubt, which we dare not utter to any of our fellow-men, we may tell to Him. He understands our tears, interprets our

sighs, and knows the mysteries of our awful souls; and His ear is ever open to us. At His throne of grace we may ever find relief in trouble, and grace to help in time of need. For a time, the Psalmist seems to have reserved his trouble not only from man but from God also. The emotions which distressed him found no utterance whatever, and so they became more intense and painful. Had he taken his grief to God, it would have been far otherwise with him.

III. Silence growing insupportable in trouble. "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing," &c. The Psalmist mused upon his own afflictions and the prosperity of the wicked, and the seeming contradictions in God's government of the world. By meditation, he realised these things more fully and intensely, until at length further silence was an impossibility. The time had come when he must speak. Upon one occasion, Jeremiah said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But it was in mine heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and could not do it." Such was the state of the Psalmist at this time.

CONCLUSION:—1. *Let us be careful in speaking our doubts and dark thoughts to men.* We are bound to see to it that we neither shake the faith of the believer, nor afford the wicked any cause to blaspheme the Holy One. **2.** *Let us communicate all our mental conflicts and troubles to God.* By so doing we shall be relieved; and He will help us by His grace and Spirit.

A COMMENDABLE RESOLUTION.

(Verse 1.)

"I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue."

We have here—

I. A great danger. We are in great danger of sinning with our tongue. There are several kinds of sinful speech of which we are in danger.

1. Sceptical or irreligious speech. The expression even of honest doubt should

be suppressed if it is likely to offend any believer, or to harden the ungodly in wickedness.

2. Careless speech. To talk in a trifling spirit of sacred things, or to speak lightly of matters which concern the reputation and honour of another, is to sin.

3. Untruthful speech. There is much

false speech without a directly uttered lie. By keeping back part of the truth, by colouring a narrative, &c., much evil is done. "A lie has no legs, and cannot stand; but it has wings, and can fly far and wide."

4. *Angry, passionate speech.* When we have lost our self-control, we are not in a fit state to speak at all. In moments of passion men utter unjust and bitter words, which rankle in the hearts of those to whom they are addressed for years, perhaps for ever. Remember, "words once spoken can never be recalled."

5. *Malicious speech.* Let us see to it that we never open our lips with the deliberate intention of injuring any one. Tale-bearers and slanderers are amongst the most guilty of men, and the greatest pests of society.

"Slander;

Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue

Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath

Rides on the posting winds; and doth belie All corners of the world: kings, queens, and states,

Maids, matrons,—nay, the secrets of the grave, This viperous slander enters."—SHAKESPEARE.

The danger of uttering sinful speeches

arises from (1.) *The facility of speech.* No organ of the body moves with greater ease than the tongue. (2.) *The fact that under provocation it is an outlet for pent-up feeling.* (3.) *The many temptations to speech.* Loquacity is a weakness of the age. With so much talking there must be much that is positively evil, and yet more that is worthless. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."

II. *A wise precaution.* "I will take heed to my ways," &c. The Psalmist resolves to guard against this evil. We need to exercise care as to—

1. *What we speak.* Let us speak only the pure, the true, the kindly, the faith-inspiring, &c. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt."

2. *When we speak.* "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

3. *How we speak.* Let us use those words which most correctly and clearly express our meaning. In our tones and manner of speech let us avoid the objectionable and evil.

CONCLUSION:—Let us not only avoid the evil, but let us also cultivate the excellent in speech.

"Apt words have power to 'suage
The tumults of a troubled mind,
And are as balm to festered wounds."

—MILTON.

SPEECH IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 4-6.)

The Psalmist in his speech reveals his—

I. *Desire to know the duration of his life.* "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." Professor Alexander and De Wette translate the last clause: "When I shall cease." And Hengstenberg: "I wish to know when I may cease." The Psalmist believed that—

1. *His days were determined by God.* Man's "days are determined, the number of his months are with Thee; Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my

change come." So the Psalmist believed that the measure of his life was fixed, and the number of his days determined by the Lord.

2. *He seeks to know when they will come to an end.* "Make me to know mine end," &c. At this time, the life of David was one of trouble; apparently it was full of sorrow, and he was anxious to know when his suffering life would terminate. But, whatever may be the prevailing tone of our life, it is not a wise thing to seek to know the times and seasons of our future days.

3. *He desires the termination of his days.* David seems to have longed in this verse for his life to be brought to a close. In his present troubled state it

seems to him that the end of his sufferings will come only with the end of his life, and he is impatient for that end. Job, in his sufferings, gives expression repeatedly to the same feeling: "Oh, that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me," &c. (Job vi. 8-11). The Psalmist evidently knew that this impatience and this want of submission to the Divine arrangements were evil. Hence, for a time, and before men, he had curbed their expression; but now he pours them out before God. Blessed is he who, whether in suffering or in rest, calmly leaves his life to God. "My times are in Thy hand."

II. Impression of the brevity of his life. "Behold, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee." The Psalmist gives a double expression to his sense of the brevity of his life. His days were "as an *handbreadth*." "The word is used to denote anything very short or brief. It is one of smallest natural measures, as distinguished from the foot, *i.e.*, the length of the foot; and from the cubit, *i.e.*, the length of the arm to the elbow." And, as compared with God's, his life shrunk, as it were, into nothingness. "My life is as *non-existence before Thee*." How brief is life even at its longest! "Our days are few and short indeed, compared with the eternity to which they are conducting us—compared with the work we have to do, for ourselves, for our families, for our generation, for God—compared with the talents committed to our trust, and the improvement of those talents required at our hands—compared with the innumerable obligations that press upon us, from our station in life, our relations in life, our opportunities of usefulness, and the means which we have both of getting and of doing good." But, compared with the eternal existence of God, our life vanishes. As Matthew Henry says: "All time is nothing to God's eternity, much less our share of time." Knowing that life is so brief, yet so important, let us prize it, improve its opportunities,—make the most of it.

III. Impression of the vanity of life.

1. *The vanity of human anxieties.*

"Surely they are disquieted in vain." The restless strivings and exertions of men seemed to the Psalmist to result in no worthy issue. "Our disquietudes," says Matthew Henry, "are often groundless (we vex ourselves without any just cause, and the occasions of our trouble are often the creatures of our own fancy and imagination), and they are always fruitless; we disquiet ourselves in vain, for we cannot, with all our disquietment, alter the nature of things or the counsel of God; things will be as they are when we have disquieted ourselves ever so much about them."

2. *The vanity of human acquisitions.*

"He heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them." The word *riches* is supplied by the translators. Hengstenberg: "He gathers and knows not who will enjoy it." The idea is that it is vain to amass treasures knowing not what will become of them when our brief tenure of life is at an end. Many are the illustrations of this truth which might be adduced. Here is one: "M. Foscue, the French millionaire miser, in order to make sure of his treasures, dug a cave in his wine-cellar, so large and deep that he could go down with a ladder. At the entrance was a door with a spring lock, which, on shutting, would fasten of itself. After a time, he was missing. Search was made for him, but to no purpose. At last, his house was sold. The purchaser, beginning to rebuild it, discovered a door in this cellar, and, going down, found him lying dead on the ground, with a candlestick near him; and, on searching farther, discovered the vast wealth which he had amassed. He went into the cave; and the door, by some accident, shutting after him, he perished for want of food. He had eaten the candle, and gnawed the flesh off both his arms. Thus died this avaricious wretch in the midst of the treasures he had heaped together."—*Dictionary of Illus.*

3. *The vanity of man himself.* "Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity." This rendering is not correct. Hengstenberg translates: "Only for

utter vanity was every man ordained." P.B.—"Verily, every man living is altogether vanity." Two ideas are expressed, (1.) that every man is vanity; (2.) that this is so because of the Divine ordination. God has constituted every man vanity. The Psalmist employs another figure to set forth the vanity of man: "Surely every man walketh in a vain show." Hengstenberg: "Only as an image walks man." To the poet man seemed an image rather than a reality,—a mere walking phantom, a thing having no power, no life in itself, but only a mere shadow of life and strength. Such was the gloomy and one-sided view of life which filled the Psalmist's mind in this time of trouble.

IV. Impatience of life. This is not so much uttered in any word, or number of words, as it breathes in the spirit of all the words of our text. The Psalmist was impatient of life by reason of its shortness, its vanity, and its sufferings. The same feeling finds outspoken and strong utterance in the Book of Job: "My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: let me alone, for my days are vanity." Such impatience of life, if found in us in this Christian age, would be both unwise and sinful. It would be *unwise*, because of its tendency to unfit us for bearing life's burden and performing life's work. It would be unwise, also, because it takes into consideration only a small fragment of our life. This is but "the bud of being, the dim dawn, the twilight of our day." The hereafter must be taken into account. It would be *sinful*, because of the want of faith in God which it involves, &c. But David, and the men of his age, must be judged by the light which they had, and not by that which we have, much of which they had not.

V. Want of clear and assured knowledge of any life beyond the present. Had he possessed such knowledge, he could not have spoken so strongly as to the utter vanity of man, not only of his anxieties, and pursuits, and acquisitions, but of man himself.

In the view of the Psalmist, at the time when he penned this psalm,

"When death
Has quenched this finer flame that moves the
heart,
Beyond is all oblivion, as waste night
That knows no following dawn, where we
shall be

As we had never been: the present, then,
Is only ours." —MALLET.

"It is not to be overlooked," says Hengstenberg, "that the psalm possesses in part an Old Testament character. While still there was no clear insight into a future state of being, a long-continued state of suffering must have sunk very deep into the heart. 'When a man dies, will he live again?' says Job; 'all the days of my war-service will I wait, till my discharge come.' With every day of his short and miserable existence was the space narrowing for the display of the retributive justice and grace of God; and when the powers of body and of soul began to fail, then the disconsolate thought would press upon him, that he would never come to partake of the blessing which God had promised to His people—it would scarcely be possible to avoid sinking into perplexity and despair. But this special Old Testament character of the psalm, far from depriving the psalm of its edifying signification for us, rather serves the purpose of enhancing it. The declaration: 'My hope stands in Thee,' which the Psalmist uttered in circumstances when it was against all reason to hope, may well put us to shame, who are easily brought into despair by light and temporal afflictions, while we have the prospect of an exceeding weight of glory; and the more that he hoped, while there was the less to hope for, so much the more readily should our hope be kindled by the light of his." Considering how dim their revelation was, as compared with ours, their faith in God is a rebuke to us, because our faith is not greater. If immortality had been clearly revealed to the Psalmist, the tone of this psalm would have been very different.

CONCLUSION: 1. *Learn the great value of "The Book of Psalms."* In these ancient poems we have true re-

cords of the life of godly souls. We see the sins and sorrows, the doubts and fears, the conflicts, temporary defeats, and glorious triumphs of these saints of old; and we are warned, encouraged, &c. Thank God for such a record of the experience of godly men.

2. *Learn the great value of Christianity.* How different does life appear since Jesus Christ has lived, died, and risen! He "hath abolished death, and

brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

3. *By the help of God let us endeavour to live well and earnestly.* "Think of living!" says Thomas Carlyle. "Thy life, wert thou the 'pitifullest of all the sons of earth,' is no idle dream, but a solemn reality. It is thy own; it is all thou hast to front eternity with. Work, then, even as He has done, and does, 'like a star, unobscured, yet unresisting.'"

MAN, A WALKING SHADOW.

(Verse 6.)

"Surely, every man walketh in a vain show."

These words suggest two main ideas:

I. Life is a journey. "Every man walketh." This figure implies—

1. *Motion.* Life is never stationary. Its wheels know no pause. We remain not a day in the same position. The traveller moves onward to fresh scenes, &c. So in life, the events and circumstances of yesterday are behind us to-day, and those of to-day will be in the past to-morrow. Life's motion is *incessant*. The traveller, in his journey, may pause to rest or to admire the scenery through which he is passing, but it is not so in the journey of life. In this there is no pausing, not even for a minute. Asleep or awake, active or indolent, living wisely or living as a fool, every man moves forward without any pause, as though urged by a resistless hand. Life's motion is *incessantly onward*. The traveller, in his journey, may retrace his steps; but, in the journey of life, we cannot turn back a single step. Every day, we are "going the way whence we shall never return." A solemn consideration this. The wise man will note it.

2. *Destiny*, and approach to it. The traveller journeys with an end in view. And life's journey has an end. As regards the body, we are travelling to the grave; as regards the soul, to the solemn retributions of eternity,—either to heaven or to hell. And how *rapidly* we advance to the solemn bourne of our pilgrimage! The eagle hastening to its

prey, the arrow speeding to its mark, the clouds driving before the strong wind, move not so swiftly as man's life. How solemn, then, is life! how important its every moment and every action!

II. Life is a journey prosecuted falsely. "Every man walketh in a vain show." Hengstenberg: "Only as an image man walks." What does this mean? It does not mean that life is not real. Life is not a vain show, not phantasmal, but a most solemn reality. Nor does it mean that man himself is unreal, a vain show, an image. Man himself is a greater reality than the solid earth or lustrous heavens. What, then, does it mean? It means that man is not true to himself; that he is false to the reality of his own being, false to the reality of life also. Man shuns himself, and lives amid unreality, amid vain shows. Practically, he ignores his own true being and lives in the realm of fiction. This implies that man is not in his normal condition. He was not made for shams, but for truth. But he half-consciously realises the fact that he has lost the blessedness of his being, and by his false modes of seeking to regain it he shows the derangement of his being and powers. *He seeks it in vain shows, in excitement, pleasure, wealth, fame, knowledge.* "What shadows we are, and what shadows do we pursue," said the great Edmund Burke. Man sometimes pursues these vain shows until he himself becomes a mere image,—a living, acting, gaudy simulacrum. Can we discover the reason of this? Partly, at least, we

may thus account for it. Man feels the greatness of his own being, and cannot interpret it; and he becomes perplexed, burdened. He has impulses which urge him to activity. He has also an instinctive consciousness that his well-being is to be found only in repose; and, prompted by these, he forms confused designs for obtaining satisfaction, by overcoming difficulties and thus gaining repose. But he does not reach the desired goal, because his course is false, and false are his aims. He is ever seeking, never finding. And deep at the root of all this falsity, and disappointment, and unrest, is the sad fact that *his own being is not in harmony*. The cause of the disquiet, and falsity, and vanity, is within him. Upon all

the unrest, and gaudy show, and baffled hopes of men we may write, "Every man walketh in a vain show." And upon the men themselves we may write, "Only as an image man walks." Only in God can man be true and blessed; and only through Christ can man rise into union with God. Restored to God, man is restored to himself, and is able to live true to himself, to live not as "an image," but as a reality. He then finds that true rest is found in the harmonious activity of the powers of his being in accordance with the will of God. Living for God, and in God, "life is real, life is earnest."

What is the character of your life-journey?

SUPPLICATION IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 7-13.)

In this instance, we use the word *supplication* not in the signification of petition or entreaty merely, but in its broad signification as including request, acknowledgment of dependence, thanksgiving, prayer. So using it, the teaching of this section may fitly be grouped under the heading, "*Supplication in Trouble.*"

Consider :

I. The confidence avowed. "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee."

1. *Man's need of hope.* Low as the Psalmist was sunk in misery, he had not lost hope. "The miserable hath no other medicine," says Shakespeare, "but only hope." "He that loses hope may part with anything."—*Congreve*. But he that retains hope may rise from great depths of misery to calm heights of joy. When that star is quenched in the firmament of the soul, the darkness is unrelieved and total. Judas lost hope, and was undone. "We are saved by hope."

2. *Man's only sufficient hope.* "My hope is in Thee." The Psalmist has already bewailed the vanity of man, and of his pursuits. Man is an image pursuing shadows. There is no trust to be

reposed in him: to hope in him is to invite disappointment. So the Psalmist turns from human pursuits and possessions, and from man himself, and fixes his hope in God. Although he regarded his troubles as coming from the hand of God, and cried bitterly and complainingly to Him, yet it was to Him that he looked,—in Him that he trusted. God may appear severe, and His ways mysterious and painful, yet there is no one beside Him to whom we can look for help, and in whom we can place our trust in the great trials of life. And He is all-sufficient in all things.

II. The submission expressed. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it."

1. *The submission.* "I am dumb, I open not my mouth." The silence which is spoken of here is very different from that spoken of in verse 2. Then he was silent lest by his murmurings against the government of God he should cause the wicked to blaspheme; now he is silent because he acquiesces in the arrangements of that government. That was the silence of rebellion, or at least of bitter dissatisfaction and complaint; this is the silence of trustful submission to the will and ways of God. He sub-

mits himself to God, feeling no desire now to complain of His providence.

2. *The reason.* "Because Thou didst it." The Psalmist looked upon his afflictions and sorrows as produced by God, and in that he found reasons for patient acquiescence. How much more should we! Knowing how wise and loving, how tender and strong He is, let us immediately check any rising complaint with the consideration, "It must be well, for Thou hast done it."

"It is Thy hand, my God ;

My sorrow comes from Thee :

I bow beneath Thy chastening rod,

'Tis love that bruises me."—DARBY.

III. The petitions presented.

1. *For the forgiveness of sin.* "Deliver me from all my transgressions ; make me not the reproach of the foolish." These two clauses have a close relation. That relation, as we understand it, may be expressed thus:—The afflictions of the Psalmist were regarded by men as a proof that he was wicked ; on this account his enemies reproached him ; if his sins were forgiven, his afflictions would cease, so he thought ; and in this way the reproaches of the wicked would be brought to an end. David seems to have viewed his sins as the cause of his sufferings and troubles. He seeks forgiveness of sin before he asks for removal of suffering. This is well and wise. Would that all efforts for the amelioration of human condition proceeded in this order ! When moral evil is no more, "natural evil" (so called) will soon cease to be. When sin is not, suffering will not long continue. When the fountain is dry, the stream will speedily cease to run.

2. *For the removal of affliction.* "Remove Thy stroke away from me ; I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand," &c. (vers. 10, 11). He regarded (1.) His afflictions as *Divine correction*, "Thy stroke, . . . the blow of Thine hand. . . . When Thou with rebukes dost correct," &c. The sufferings of the people of God are frequently God's chastisement by reason of their sins. When He corrects us, it is because of our iniquity, and in love to us. "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor

faint when thou art rebuked of Him ; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," &c. (Heb. xii. 5–11). (2.) *His affliction was severe.* "I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand. . . . Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth." Margin : "That which is to be desired in him to melt away." Hengstenberg : "Thou dost consume, as by a moth, what he loves." As the moth consumes the most beautiful woollen garment or the finest sable, so the Psalmist says he was being consumed away by the afflictions which had come upon him,—his strength and vigour, his cheerfulness, and courage, and beauty, were passing away before the expressions of the displeasure of God. Yet, severe as these corrections were, God could remove them. Low as he was reduced by suffering, God could raise him up again. For this he prays. He turns for healing to the hand that wounded him ; for lifting up to Him who had brought him low.

3. *For invigoration before death.* "O spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more." Hengstenberg : "Leave off from me, that I may be revived, before I go away and be no more." The first member, literally : Look away from me, that I may brighten up ; *q.d.* turn away from me Thy *angry* look, so that my sorrowful one may be made cheerful. "The idea," says Barnes, "is that of being *cheered up* ; of being strengthened and invigorated before he should pass away." He desired to be invigorated and comforted before he passed away from this world for ever.

IV. The pleas urged. "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry ; hold not Thy peace at my tears," &c. (ver. 12). The Psalmist pleads—

1. *His sorrow.* "Hold not Thy peace at my tears." "Weeping, if unrummuring," says Barnes, "is of the nature of prayer, for God regards the sorrows of the soul as He sees them. The weeping penitent, the weeping sufferer, is one on whom we may suppose God looks with compassion, even though the sorrows of the soul do not find words to give utterance to them." And, says John Arnd,

"This is the effect of tears, when one sees or hears any one weeping sadly, one cannot well remain silent, as the Lord Jesus said to the woman at Nain, 'Weep not;' and to Mary Magdalene, 'Woman, why weepest Thou?' This nature teaches us. Now, if a man can scarcely be silent to a person's tears, how much less the Lord God! Therefore, it is said in Psalm lvi. that God numbers the tears of believers, and in Isaiah xxv. that He will wipe away all tears from our eyes." In thus pleading his sorrow, the Psalmist appeals to the compassion of God. "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

2. *His dependence.* "For I am a stranger with Thee,—a sojourner, as all my fathers." "A stranger and pilgrim has nothing of his own, he is quite de-

pendent upon the goodness of those with whom he lives, is everywhere on the footing of a beggar." By thus pleading his dependence, the Psalmist appeals to the faithfulness of God. Such appeals are ever met by a full and gracious response.

CONCLUSION:—There is still much vanity, and gloom, and sorrow, in life. There are times when our "burden seems greater than our strength can bear," and we are ready to cry out in impatient complaint to God. But let us take our burdens to Him. He will interpret their meaning, and give us strength to bear them. He is the unfailing support in life's troubles of all who trust in Him. "Lord, my hope is in Thee."

GOD AFFLICTING, AND MAN SUBMITTING.

(Verse 9.)

"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it."

I. *God afflicting man.* "Thou didst it." This will apply—

1. *To many temporal losses, e.g.,* those occasioned by floods, storms, earthquakes, &c.

2. *To many bodily afflictions.*

3. *To the bereavements of death.* "I saw this verse engraved with great appropriateness on a beautiful marble monument that had been erected over a grave where lay three children that had been suddenly cut down by the scarlet fever. What could be more suitable in such a trial than such a text? What could more strikingly express the true feelings of Christian piety—the calm submission of redeemed

souls—than the disposition of parents, thus bereaved, to record such a sentiment over the grave of their children?"—*Barnes.*

II. *Man submitting to God.* "I am dumb, I open not my mouth, because Thou didst it." Submission to God may be enforced by the following considerations:

1. *The folly of rebelling against Him.*

2. *The perfection of His character.* He is perfect in wisdom, goodness, faithfulness. In accordance with these glorious attributes, He governs the world.

3. *The uses of suffering.* Great are the benefits of sanctified affliction. "Thou didst it," we say now in submission. "He hath done all things well," we shall soon exclaim in rapture.

PSALM XL.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription: "To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David."

The psalm is addressed to "the Chief Musician," that he might set it to music for use in public worship. We have no means of determining on what occasion the psalm was written. It does not come within our province to enter into the disputed question of the Messianic character of the psalm. The different opinions which are held on this question are stated by *Barnes in loco*, and by Professor Stuart in his "Commentary on Hebrews" (Excursus xx.).

Both these writers advocate their own view at considerable length. See also Hengstenberg's Introduction to this psalm. One thing, perhaps, we ought to say, viz., that on the theory adopted by Barnes, "that the psalm had an original and exclusive reference to the Messiah," it seems to us impossible legitimately and satisfactorily to interpret it.

Homiletically, we shall view the psalm thus:—The Lord's doings for His servant (vers. 1-5); The servant's offering to his Lord (vers. 6-10); and, The servant's prayer to his Lord (vers. 11-17).

THE LORD'S DOINGS FOR HIS SERVANT.

(Verses 1-5.)

In these verses, we have—

I. A sad situation. The Psalmist represents himself as having been in "an horrible pit," and in "miry clay." The situation was one of

1. *Darkness.* בֹּרַח = a pit, a prison, a dungeon, a grave, a deep well. It implies darkness. The sun may be flooding the world with his beams, but in the pit all is midnight darkness. The figure may be used to set forth a state of sin or a state of deep sorrow. Both these states are frequently represented in Scripture by "darkness." "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light," &c. "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light," &c. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." *Et al.*

2. *Distress.* "An horrible pit." "The word rendered *horrible*, נִסְחָה, means properly *noise, uproar, tumult*, as of waters: of a crowd of men; of war. De Wette understands it here of a pit, a cavern, or an abyss that roars and is tumultuous; that is, that is impassable. Perhaps this is the idea,—a cavern, deep and dark, where the waters roar, and which seems to be filled with horrors." —*Barnes.* Hengstenberg takes it to mean, "a deep of raging waters," "a roaring deep." In any case, the figure indicates distress. The poet was not only in darkness, but in misery also. Sin is wretchedness. Sin is hell.

3. *Helplessness.* The Psalmist was in the "miry clay," the "slimy mud," where there was no firm footing. He was totally unable to do anything to effect his own deliverance, for he was "sinking in deep mire, and could not

stand." The unrenewed sinner is helpless in effecting his own deliverance from sin and its consequences. If some strong arm do not come to his rescue, he must continue to sink in the miry clay until he is hopelessly lost. Such is the sad situation of the sinner; his state is one of darkness, distress, helplessness.

II. A great salvation. "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry," &c. Of this salvation the poet points out that —1. *It was granted in answer to prayer.* The Psalmist *prayed*. "He heard my cry." In his darkness, wretchedness, and helplessness, David betook himself to prayer; and though the pit was deep—"a roaring deep"—yet the Lord heard his cry. From the deepest depth the faintest whisper of true prayer will reach to the throne of God, and receive audience of Him. The Psalmist *waited*. "I waited patiently for the Lord." Margin: "In waiting I waited." He continued to wait for the interposition of God. Many prayers are not answered because the suppliant does not wait for the answer—does not expect an answer. David persevered in prayer; he waited expecting the succour and salvation of God. That salvation did not come quickly; but he patiently waited, believing, hoping, praying, expecting its coming.

2. *It was complete.* "He brought me up also out of," &c. We have here —(1) *Deliverance.* The Psalmist was rescued from his wretched and perilous state. God delivers both from sin and misery all who sincerely seek Him. (2) *Elevation.* "Set my feet upon a rock," far above the waters of the roaring deep. God raises souls from darkness into light, from deep despair into

exalted hope, &c. (3) *Establishment.* "Set my feet upon a rock," where I may find firm footing. "Established my goings." Made my steps firm. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the rock on which the sinner may securely stand. On Him we may build our character, our hopes, &c. (4) *Invigoration.* "Established my goings." The Divine life is not stationary, but progressive. God delivers man from sin, and starts him on the road to holiness and heaven, and invigorates him to tread that road. "They go from strength to strength." "We follow on to know the Lord." God bids us "Go forward," and gives us strength to do so.

3. *It was joy-inspiring.* "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." The Lord had given a new occasion for praise, and by filling the Psalmist's heart with grateful gladness, had given him the disposition to offer fresh praises unto Him. Salvation is a joyous, a blessed thing. It tunes a man's life to music. It fills his heart with music, and the world with beauty and song.

4. *It was influential.* "Many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." (1) *God's doings on behalf of His people are manifest.* "Many shall see." When a man is converted the change is visible in his life. (2) *God's doings on behalf of His people command reverence.* "And fear." The fear is reverential. Not dread, but veneration. (3) *God's doings on behalf of His people encourage others to trust in Him.* "And shall trust in the Lord." As men mark the doings of God on behalf of His people, they have such exhibitions of His faithfulness and goodness and power as lead them in faith to seek His salvation. They see the workings of His grace in their lives, and are led to seek that grace for themselves. "They glorified God in me." Do our lives testify to the power of Divine grace so that men through us are led to trust in Him?

III. A hearty celebration. The Psalmist celebrates—

1. *The blessedness of the man who trusts in the Lord.* (1) *He rejects every*

other object of confidence. "He respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies." Literally: "he looks not to the proud," he does not expect help or blessing from them. Man, however strong and proud, is not an adequate object of confidence for any creature. He is liable to err, and may be deceived, and may be deceitful himself, and is therefore not sufficient as an object of trust. Neither as regards faithfulness and truth, nor as regards ability and strength, is man an adequate object of trust. (2) *He places his sole confidence in God.* "Maketh the Lord his trust." The Lord is ever mighty to save, and is faithful amid all changes. We may safely trust in Him. *Trust in Him is blessed.* He who trusts in Him shall never be put to shame, shall realise the most blessed security, shall find his highest expectations more than fulfilled, &c.

2. *The wonderful doings of God for man* (ver. 5). Matthew Henry's notes on this verse are excellent. "*Many, O Lord my God! are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done both for me and others; this is but one of many.* Many are the benefits with which we are daily loaded, both by the providence and by the grace of God. (1) *They are His works,* not only the gifts of His bounty, but the operations of His power. He works for us, He works in us, and thus He favours us with matter, not only for thanks, but for praise. (2) *They are His wonderful works,* the contrivance of them admirable, His condescension to us in bestowing them upon us admirable; eternity itself will be short enough to be spent in the admiration of them. (3) *All His wonderful works are the product of His thoughts to us-ward.* He does all according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. i. 11), the purposes of His grace which He purposed in Himself (Eph. iii. 11). They are the projects of infinite wisdom, the designs of everlasting love (1 Cor. ii. 7; Jer. xxxi. 3), thoughts of good, and not of evil (Jer. xxix. 11). His gifts and callings will therefore be without repentance, because they are not sudden resolves, but the result of His thoughts, His many thoughts, to us-ward. (4) *They*

are innumerable; they cannot be methodised, or 'reckoned up in order.' There is an order in all God's works, but there are so many that present themselves to our view at once that we know not where to begin nor which to name next; the order of them and their natural references and dependencies, and how the links of the golden chain are joined, are a mystery to us, and what we shall not be able to account for till the veil be rent and the mystery of God finished. Nor can they be counted, not the very heads of them. When we have said the most we can of the wonders of Divine love to us, we must conclude with an *et*

cætera—and such like, and adore the depth, despairing to find the bottom."

CONCLUSION.—1. *To those who have experienced this great salvation.* Praise God in a new song, celebrate His glorious deeds, trust Him unfalteringly and fully, and let your life show forth His praise, that "many may see, and fear, and trust in the Lord." 2. *To those who are in the sad state of unrenewed sinners.* Your condition is indeed deplorable and dangerous. Do you realise it as such? The Lord waits to rescue you from it. Cry unto Him, wait patiently for Him, and He will incline His ear and save you.

HOPE IN THE SADDEST SITUATION.

(Verses 1-3.)

If some parts of this psalm are more applicable to the Messiah, other parts, undoubtedly, are more applicable to David. Of himself the Psalmist seems here more immediately to be speaking. Observe—

I. The situation he was in. This was sad indeed.

1. He was *fallen low*—in a "pit." How sunk in guilt and corruption is man by nature!

2. He was *besmeared*, having stuck fast in mire or clay. Sin renders our whole persons the very reverse of comeliness and beauty in the sight of God.

3. He was an *outcast*—in a "pit," without communion with society. Thus, too, are all naturally far off from God, separated from His favour and protection.

4. He was *miserable*—in "an horrible pit." Oh! what horrors our iniquities bring upon us."

5. He was in *great danger*. In a "pit" he could devise no way of escape, so that, to human appearance, his case was hopeless. And no less dangerous is our condition. Ah! what dismal forebodings we have.

II. The devout exercise of his mind. Distressing as the condition of David was, it will be instructive to us if we consider how he acted. 1. *He betook himself to prayer.* This was a certain mean of

succeeding. It is the mean which God expects every weary and heavy-laden sinner to use. Nor can the wisdom of such an appointment be doubted, as constituting a test of our humility and of our obedience.

2. *He hoped in His mercy.* The Lord, not immediately vouchsafing him an answer, he became more and more urgent, trusting ultimately to find acceptance. He waited for the Lord patiently. Thus, then, it is good to wait, without murmuring, for answers of peace, on carrying our troubles to a throne of grace.

III. The deliverance he obtained.

God inclined His ear to Him and heard his cry, and his deliverance was—

1. *Elevating.* Though before in a pit, in the miry clay of which he found himself sinking yet further, he is now brought up out of it; and not only so, but his feet are set upon a rock. And all who stand upon the Rock Christ Jesus are exalted far above this world, and are brought already to the confines of glory.

2. *Establishing.* "Established my goings." Oh! the stability we have by trusting in Christ. We may then defy all the powers of darkness (Matt. xvi. 18).

3. *Joyous.* "He hath put a new song in my mouth," &c. This is surely

applicable to the believer, who, in fact, has not only cause to rejoice, but a disposition likewise to do so.

4. *Encouraging.* "Many shall see, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Yes, all may expect the same mercy as

David in a diligent use of the same means. For this glorious example is intended by God to give us hope, however low our state may be, He being always able and always near to deliver us (Jonah ii. 2-6, *et al.*)—*W. Sleight.*

THE SERVANT'S OFFERING TO HIS LORD.

(Verses 6-10.)

In this section we pass from the great and gracious doings of God on behalf of the Psalmist to the Psalmist's expression of his gratitude to God. What offering will he present to his Lord? In what way will he express his gratitude to Him?

I. By obedience to God (vers. 6-8).

1. *He will not sacrifice material sacrifices instead of obedience.* "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required." "The four words employed in this verse—sacrifice, offering, burnt-offering, sin-offering—embrace all the species of sacrifice and offerings known among the Hebrews."—*Barnes.* "In what respect it is said here, that God did not wish sacrifices, since He had expressly commanded them, appears from the contrast. Obedience, the willing performance of the Divine command, is set over against presentation of offerings. Offerings, therefore, are rejected in so far as they form a compensation for that, in so far as they would in a manner satisfy, put off God."—*Hengstenberg.* Our outward services, offerings of prayer, praise, and material gifts, are of no value in the sight of God, unless they are the expression of the homage of the heart, and are accompanied by obedience of life. (Comp. 1 Sam. xv. 22, and Ps. li. 16, 17.) On the latter passage Dr. Parker says: "We have been led to believe that God *does* desire sacrifice; that sacrifice is the basis of all atonement, and that without sacrifice approach to God is an impossibility. Were we to pause at this verse (16), however, and to accept the words in their literal signification, we should come to the conclusion that sacrifice

was entirely unnecessary as a condition of communion with the Most High on the part of sinful man. The next verse explains the Psalmist's meaning. He says, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' This shows that all sacrifice is worthless which is not vitalised by the moral element. Where the sacrifice represents a broken spirit, where it sets forth the operations of a contrite heart, it becomes acceptable to God, and useful as a basis of negotiation with Heaven. Where the moral element is present, the physical element will not be forgotten; this is beautifully brought out in the last expression in the psalm. 'Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,' &c. From this it is clear that though sacrifice in itself, without the presence of spiritual feeling, is absolutely worthless in the sight of God, yet where the moral element is present in the form of a broken spirit and a contrite heart, sacrifice will be presented even in its material forms. Thereby the penitent man expresses his love, and fosters his faith, and testifies his gratitude. Blessed be God, in our case it is unnecessary that we provide bullock or burnt-offering. The one final sacrifice has been offered in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

2. *He will render the obedience which God requires.* "Then I said: Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is prescribed to me. To do Thy will, my God, I delight, and Thy law is in my inner part."—(Hengstenberg's trans.) "The *volume* or *roll-book*, is the Pentateuch, which from the first was written on parchment. In the time of David,

when no other sacred book existed, every one would at once understand what was meant by the roll-book." As confirming this interpretation comp. Josh. i. 7; 1 Kings ii. 3; and 2 Kings xxii. 13. David was left in no uncertainty as to what the will of God was. In the Pentateuch God had made known His will, and clearly unfolded His requirements; and the Psalmist resolves that he will obey that will.

3. *He will render that obedience heartily.* "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." On the law of God in the heart of His people comp. Deut. vi. 6; Ps. xxxvii. 31; Prov. vii. 1-3; and Isa. li. 7. "Where matters are as they should be, there the law is not merely prescribed, but inscribed." "When the law of God is written in our hearts, our duty will be our delight."

4. *God had disposed him to render that obedience.* Such we take to be the meaning of the words translated, "Mine ears hast Thou opened." Margin: "digged." Hengstenberg: "Ears hast Thou dug through for me." "An indisposition to obey the will of God is often expressed by the fact that the ears are *stopped*: Zech. vii. 11; Ps. lviii. 4, 5; Prov. xxi. 13. The essential idea is, that this truth has been communicated to him—that God preferred obedience to sacrifice; and that he had been made attentive to that truth, *as if* he had been before deaf, and his ears had been opened."—*Barnes*. Hengstenberg paraphrases the clause: "Thou hast made me hearing, obedient." He says, "The LXX. have rendered the words by σώμα δὲ κατηργίσαι μοι, but a body hast Thou prepared for me; and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has adopted them, because the thought is not altered by this translation. The contrast there also is the presentation of thanks through the whole life and conduct, in opposition to single and merely external offerings: Thou hast given me a body, so that I willingly serve Thee in the execution of Thy will." If we render hearty obedience to the will of God, if obedience be pleasurable to us, it is because He has

"inclined our heart unto His testimonies." This hearty, grateful obedience the servant offers to his Lord.

II. *By publication of the perfections of God.* "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation," &c., (verses 9, 10). Notice—

1. *What it is that he announces.* (1) *Righteousness.* "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation," *i.e.*, the righteousness which God prescribes for man, and requires from him. "I have not hid Thy righteousness within my heart," *i.e.*, the righteousness which God displays in His dealings with man. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." (2) *Faithfulness.* "I have declared Thy faithfulness; I have not concealed Thy truth." Amid all the mutations of His universe, He changes not. What He hath promised He will perform. He is worthy of the supreme confidence of all His creatures. (3) *Lovingkindness.* "I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness." He had announced God's mercy towards sinners, His pity towards the wretched, His goodness to all. (4) *Salvation.* "I have declared Thy salvation." He related the deliverances which God had wrought on behalf of His people. He told of His gracious doings on his own behalf.

2. *Where he makes his announcement.* "In the great congregation." Barnes objects: "It would be difficult to see how *this* could be applied to David himself, or on what occasion of his life this could be said of him." But the word translated "preach" is not to be understood in the limited sense in which that word is now used. Fuerst, in his Lexicon, gives as its meaning in this place—"to announce, to relate, to tell of." Now David is conspicuous above all the men of his age for having announced in these immortal Psalms the perfections of the character, and the greatness and glory of the works of God. And many of these Psalms, as the superscriptions show, were intended for use "in the great congregation." So David "preached," *i.e.*, announced, "righteousness in the great congregation," &c. He made known the glory

of the Divine Being, and of His works and ways, in the most public manner, and to the largest audience that he could secure.

CONCLUSION.—What a worthy offering was this which David presented to the Lord! The excellence of this method of expressing his gratitude is seen in this, that: 1. *It reveals his appreciation of the Giver as well as of the Gift.* He rejoiced not only in the greatness of the benefits he had received, but also in the goodness of the Benefactor. He celebrated not only the gracious dealings of God with him, but also the glory of God in His own character and perfections. 2. *It was calculated to confer great benefits on men.* He who imparts to man true ideas

of the Divine Being is rendering the highest service to his race. David did this in two ways: by celebrating the character and doings of God in sacred song, and by expressing the will of God in a life heartily conformed thereto. The manifestation of God in the life of a good man is of unspeakable value to our world.

For us also the Lord hath done great things. What offering shall we make Him in return? We cannot do better than imitate the Psalmist in this respect.

NOTE.—For an exposition of verses 6–10 as applied to the Messiah, see Barnes or Matthew Henry *in loco*. The exposition of the latter is well arranged and suggestive homiletically.

HE THAT KNOWS GOD WILL CONFESS HIM.

(Verse 10.)

I propose to speak of—

The necessary openness of a holy experience; or, in other words, the impossibility that the inward revelation of God in the soul could be shut up in it, and remain hid or unacknowledged.

I shall have in view especially two classes of hearers that are widely distinguished one from the other: first, the class who hide the grace of God in their heart undesignedly, or by reason of some undue modesty; and, secondly, the class who, pretending to have it, or consciously having it not, take a pleasure in throwing discredit on all the appropriate expressions of it, such as are made by the open testimony and formal profession of Christ before men.

Where there is a true grace of experience in the heart, it ought to be, must, and will be manifest.

1. A true inward experience or discovery of God in the heart is itself an impulse also of self-manifestation, as all love and gratitude are, wants to speak and declare itself, and will as naturally do it, when it is born, as a child will utter its first cry.

2. The change implied in a true Christian experience, or the revelation of God in the heart, is in its very nature

the soul and root of an outward change that is correspondent. It is the righteousness of God revealed within, to be henceforth the actuating spring and power of a righteous and devoted life.

3. If any one purposes beforehand, in his religious endeavours, or in seeking after God, to come into a secret experience and keep it a secret, his endeavour is plainly one that falsifies the very notion of Christian piety, and if he succeeds, or seems to succeed, he only practises a fraud in which he imposes on himself.

4. The grace of God in the heart, unmanifested or kept secret, as many propose that it shall be, even for their whole life, will be certainly stifled and extinguished. Nothing can live that is not permitted to show the signs of life. "If we deny Him, He also will deny us."

5. This is the express teaching of the gospel, which everywhere and in every possible way calls out the souls renewed in Christ to live an open life of sacrifice and duty, and so to witness a good confession (Matt. xix. 21; Luke ix. 23, 26; John xv. 16, 19, 20).

6. There is no shade of encouragement given to this notion of salvation

by a secret piety in any of the Scripture examples or teachings. The nearest approach to such encouragement anywhere given is that which is afforded by the case of the two senators, Joseph and Nicodemus (John iii. 1-21, xix. 38). They were good as disciples to bury Jesus, but not to save His life or serve Him while living. The most fragrant spices are those that honour one's life, and not the posthumous odours that embalm His body (Matt. v. 14-16).

CONCLUSION.—Notice : 1. The very absurd pretence of those who congratulate themselves on having so much of secret merit, which they even count the more meritorious because they keep it secret. It is not the righteousness of God which they have hidden so carefully, but it is their own—which, after all, is not hid. They do not break out and confess the Lord, simply because He is not in them.

2. The significance of the profession of Christ, when and why, and with what

views it should be made. It should be made, because where there is anything to be professed it cannot but be made. . . . There is no option here, save as all duties are optional, and eternity hangs on the option we make.

3. What value there may be in the discoveries of Christian experience, and the legitimate use they may have in Christian society. Some of the best and holiest impulses ever given to the cause of God in men's hearts are given by testimonies of Christian experience (Mal. iii. 16).

4. The true wisdom, in all these matters of holy experience, is to act naturally. If you seem to yourself to have really passed from death unto life, and to have come into God's peace, interpose no affectations of modesty, no restrictions of mock-prudence, but in true natural modesty and a sound natural discretion testify the grace you have received (Matt. x. 32, 33).—*H. Bushnell, D.D., from "The New Life," abridged.*

THE SERVANT'S PRAYER TO HIS LORD.

(Verses 11-17.)

This prayer of the poet suggests the following observations—

I. The most assured confidence in God is not regarded by His servant as a substitute for prayer. In the previous portion of the psalm, David has expressed unshaken and unlimited confidence in God, yet here we find him confessing his sins, complaining of his troubles, and seeking relief from God. Thankfulness and trust are foundations for prayer. Hengstenberg points out that the relation of the "withhold not Thou Thy tender mercies" to the "I have not refrained," in ver. 9, suggests "the doctrine that the measure of the further salvation proceeds according to the measure of thankfulness for the earlier." And "the words 'Let Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth continually preserve me' point back to 'I will not conceal Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth,' with which the Psalmist had closed his promise of thanksgiving. That we will

not conceal God's lovingkindness and truth, is the sure means, but also the indispensable condition of its further manifestation in our experience." Thankfulness and trust, so far from precluding the necessity of prayer, are incentives and encouragements to its exercise. The man of assured faith will be a man of frequent prayer.

II. A true servant of God may fall into many sins. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me," &c. There is great force in the expressions used by the Psalmist in this verse. He seems to have had a deep and painful impression of his sins. He makes mention of

1. *Their number.* "They are more than the hairs of mine head." When we think of sins of infirmity and imperfection, and sins of omission, and secret sins of thought and feeling, to the awakened conscience they appear altogether innumerable.

2. *Their grasp.* "Mine iniquities

have taken hold upon me." His sins had seized him, arrested him, "as the bailiff does the poor debtor." Sin with its dark memories and in its dire consequences frequently holds a man as with an iron grip.

3. *Their effect.* "I am not able to look up, . . . my heart faileth me." "The idea here is not that he was unable to *look up*, but that the calamities which came upon him were so heavy and severe as to make his sight dim or deprive him of vision."—*Barnes*. Luther: "My sight gives way under great sorrow." Hengstenberg: "The heart is here not exactly the feeling, spirit, but is rather considered as the seat of the powers of life. 'My strength faileth me,' in Ps. xxxviii. 10, is parallel."

If this confession of sin and its results seem exaggerated, let it be remembered that an awakened and sensitive conscience detects and grieves for sins when the hardened conscience would not discover any sin at all.

"That the Psalmist speaks here of his numerous offences, and treats of his suffering as the righteous punishment of these, forms an irrefragable proof against the direct Messianic exposition."—*Hengstenberg*.

III. If a true servant of God fall into sin, the penalty of his sin will surely come upon him. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about." God's laws, with the penalties annexed to every breach of them, are universal in their operation. They are not respecters of persons. In the case of no one is this more conspicuous than in the life of David. His sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, in their consequences, never ceased to darken and trouble his life even to its very close. "Whoso" (saint or sinner) "breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

IV. A servant of God suffering the penalty of his sin may seek deliverance from God. "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me." *An essential condition of deliverance is that he who seeks it shall have come to feel the heinousness of the sin for which he suffers.*

Where the sinfulness of the sin is deeply realised, the penalty has in great part, at least, accomplished its end. But when any one seeks to be rid of the suffering without loathing the sin, it is clear that in him suffering has not yet accomplished its end. But in what way does God deliver His people from the evils of their sins?

1. *By removing the guilt and the consciousness of it.* That we have grieved a holy and generous Father is the sorest part of our suffering. God takes that away by the assurance of forgiveness.

2. *By removing the penalty.* Sometimes in answer to prayer God sees fit to remove or to mitigate the sufferings which have come upon his people as the result of their sins.

3. *By imparting grace and patience to bear the penalty.* If He remove not the penalty, He will take the bitterness out of it, and give us strength to bear it.

It is a great thing to be able to go to Him and seek relief and deliverance. The approach to Him in itself is helpful. And He will certainly grant to us an answer,—wise, gracious, and satisfactory.

The Psalmist's prayer for help is marked by great urgency. "O Lord, make haste to help me." "Make no tarrying, O my God." Great suffering and a deep sense of need make us earnest and urgent in prayer. They do not utter themselves in long, rhetorical petitions, but in brief, expressive, heaven-reaching cries.

V. In his prayer the servant of God has reference not to himself alone, but to others also.

1. *Here is a reference to his enemies.* "Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it," &c. (vers. 14, 15). The enemies of the Psalmist seem to have been many, and to have manifested their animosity in different ways. Here are—(1) *The actively hostile*; "them that seek after my soul to destroy it." (2) *The evil disposed*; "them that wish me evil." (3) *The mockers*; "them that say unto me, Aha, Aha." He prays for the discomfiture of all these. "There is no sin in the wish that the

wicked may not be successful in their plans, and may not be suffered to injure us."—*Barnes*.

2. *Here is a reference to the godly.* "Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee; let such as love Thy salvation say continually, "The Lord be magnified." There is a beautiful connection between the character indicated and the blessing sought. They that seek the Lord shall find Him, and finding Him shall rejoice and be glad in Him. For the seeker the joy of becoming the finder. They that love His salvation shall realise it so fully as to be

filled with praise and to cry, "The Lord be magnified." May they so continuously realise His saving grace as to have cause for continually exalting and glorifying God.

VI. The servant of God in his deepest distress confides in the Lord God. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me," &c. (For an exposition of this verse see the homiletic sketch on it given below.)

CONCLUSION.—Amid both the sins and the sufferings of life, let the servants of God have recourse to Him in prayer.

THE HOLD OF SIN.

(Verse 12.)

A course of sin is a course of lawlessness. Certain liberty may be enjoyed, but penal consequences are sure to follow. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about." Sin takes hold upon the sinner by violence and force. Justice arrests and brings him before the tribunal.

Sin takes hold upon men—

I. **By its power.** It overcomes them, subdues them by habits, and keeps them bound in captivity and degradation. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."

II. **By an accusing conscience.** All men have a conscience, speaking in stillness, or thundering in power—watching

and weighing all they do,—a monitor in their bosom—a witness for God. "The candle of the Lord searching all their inward parts."

III. **By its evil consequences.** Fear, shame, and liability to punishment—the curse and condemnation of a broken law. The sinner carries within his bosom a prediction, a foretaste of the judgment to come. The terrors of hell get hold upon him, and there is no deliverance but in Christ. "He Himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree—redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He can save from sin and its consequences.—J. W. in "*The Study*."

MAN'S NEED AND GOD'S THOUGHT.

(Verse 17.)

"I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me."

We regard these words as the expression of a humble, trustful heart under a sense of need. We have here,

I. **An acknowledgment of human need.** "I am poor and needy." In the world there is much *physical* poverty and need. That is bad. Much *mental* poverty: that is worse. Much *spiritual* poverty: that is worst of all. Better to be Lazarus at the gate than the rich

man in the palace. Some who are spiritually impoverished are quite unconscious of it. They are paupers, yet they imagine themselves millionaires. They say that they are "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Most deplorable!

1. *This need is an evidence of sin.* A loving Creator, having "unsearchable riches," would not make His creatures poor and needy. Some disarrangement

of His order must have taken place. Spiritual bankruptcy cannot be a result of the plans of the Infinite and all-generous Spirit.

2. *The consciousness of this need is a condition of its removal.* When men fall asleep in the frost and snow by reason of cold, and become insensible unto the cold, they sleep the sleep of death. While they feel the cold they will strive to preserve vital heat, and so repel the cold. The sense of this poverty is the first step to its removal. Until we feel our hunger we shall never seek the living bread.

3. *The confession of this need is well-pleasing to God.* It indicates a true estimate of ourselves, and humility before God. When we think of our low attainments, and those to which we are called, how poor are we! When we consider our mean acquisitions, and the "unsearchable riches," how poor are we!

II. An expression of confidence in God. "The Lord thinketh upon me." There is something very cheering and strengthening in this. I am lonely and sad and weary; but I think of some loving one, perhaps hundreds of miles away, who is thinking kindly of me, and I am refreshed, comforted, strengthened.

God thinks of *me*, of all men, of every man. We think and speak of the particular and the general, of the individual and the collective body. We cannot at once think of many particulars, or of many individuals, as such; so we think of persons collectively, and of particulars as classified. But the Infinite Mind has no such limitations. Amid the millions of creatures that depend upon His care

and are the recipients of His bounty, not one escapes His notice. Superintending the universe, He also numbers the very hairs of the head of every one of His people.

"The Lord thinketh upon *me*." He cares for every individual; for *thee*, as though in all His universe He had no other to care for. "Ah! that may be true," say you, "of David, a king, and sacred poet, and man highly favoured of God; but does He so think of *me*, a poor, low, unworthy one?" To doubt it is to "limit the Holy One of Israel." "The Lord thinketh upon *me*;" *then*, *He knows my need*. He sees our exact circumstances and condition, and consequent need. He knows the precise character of my poverty, and will remove it by communicating the precise treasures which I lack.

"The Lord thinketh upon *me*;" *then*, *He will supply my need*. His thought is neither purposeless nor resultless. His thoughts receive embodiment. His thought of us indicates care for us, and results in provision for us. Wherever the sense of poverty and need is, there may the assurance of the Divine thought and care also be. If we are hungering after Him, most assuredly He is thinking of us individually.

Examples of His care for individuals abound. Daniel in the lions' den, Joseph in prison, Peter in prison, and our own experience.

In this thought of God of us and for us we have:—1. *What a solace in loneliness!* 2. *What a comfort in the day of sorrow!* 3. *What an inspiration for Christian work!* 4. *What an assurance of victory in death!*

PSALM XLI.

INTRODUCTION.

This psalm, like the preceding one, is from the pen of David, and is addressed "to the chief musician," for use in public religious services. It seems to have been composed with reference to a period when the Psalmist was suffering from bodily sickness, and from the malice of his enemies and the faithlessness and ingratitude of friends. "The kernel of our psalm," says Hengstenberg, "is contained in Psalm xxxv. 13, 14. The fundamental idea is this, that he who is compassionate will receive compassion, that he who has the consciousness of having wept with the weeping, may console himself with the assurance that his own weeping shall be turned by God into laughing." Homiletically we shall consider the psalm as setting forth—The blessedness of the compassionate (vers. 1-3); the complaint, prayer, and confidence of the compassionate (vers. 4-12); and the doxology (ver. 13).

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE COMPASSIONATE.

(Verses 1-3.)

The blessings mentioned in these verses are for the man "that considereth the poor." By "the poor" in this place we must understand the weak and feeble, those who are in a depressed condition, and need the sympathy and aid of others. The word may be used in reference to those who are in a low condition by reason of poverty, bodily affliction, or sorrow. The consideration of which the Psalmist speaks is a thoughtful sympathy and help, "the manifestations of a tender fellow-feeling." And the man who extends this thoughtful sympathy and help to the poor, the Psalmist pronounces "blessed." He is blessed with—

I. Divine deliverance. "The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." Margin: "in the day of evil." Hengstenberg: "in the day of distress." "The day of evil" is a period with which all men are more or less acquainted. The present state is characterised by affliction and trial, pain and sorrow, disease and death. But "if any be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger," the compassionate shall. The Lord will keep them in the day of distress, and will deliver them.

II. Divine preservation. "The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive." "This," says Barnes, "refers to a *general*, not a *universal* rule in the Divine administration, that acts of piety will be partially rewarded on the earth; or that the Divine favour will be shown to those who deal kindly with others." When the shafts of death fly quickly around them, they shall be shielded by God. He who manifests kindness and care for the afflicted and sorrowful may expect, when he is placed in similar circumstances, that God will interpose for his preservation.

III. Divine blessing. "He shall be blessed upon the earth." Hengstenberg: "in the land." "This is in accordance with the doctrine noticed above, and so often referred to in the psalms and elsewhere, that the effect of religion

will be to promote happiness and prosperity in this life."—*Barnes*. "If it may be for God's glory, and the man's good, this temporal life shall be preserved, and evidences of God's blessing shall be seen upon him."—*Dickson*.

IV. Divine reservation. "Thou wilt not deliver him to the will of his enemies." When attacked by foes the Lord will defend the compassionate man, so that they shall neither ensnare him by their wiles, nor overpower him by their might. "The most potent enemy we have can have no power against us but what is given him from above. The good-will of a God that loves us is sufficient to secure us from the ill-will of all that hate us, men and devils; and that good-will we may promise ourselves an interest in, if we have considered the poor and helped to relieve and rescue them."—*M. Henry*.

V. Divine support in affliction. "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." God has not promised His people "that they shall never be sick, nor that they shall not lie languishing, nor that their sickness shall not be unto death; but He has promised to enable them to bear their affliction with patience, and cheerfully to wait the issue. The soul by His grace shall be made to dwell at ease when the body lies in pain."—*M. Henry*. On the second clause, Hengstenberg says, "'All his couch dost Thou change in his sickness.' The couch stands here for the state of the sick; God changes his couch of pain and sickness into one of convalescence and joy, and that entirely." And *M. Henry*, "That bed must needs be well made which God Himself has the making of." When we are in affliction it is no small comfort to remember that we have kindly ministered to others in like circumstances. And God Himself will relieve and comfort those who have so done in all their sufferings.

CONCLUSION: — 1. *Heed well the principle which underlies our text, that God will deal with us as we do with others.* “With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful,” &c. (Ps. xviii. 25–27. “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.” “With what

measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.”

2. *Cultivate a kind and considerate spirit toward the poor, the sorrowful, the afflicted.* By so doing, we tread in the footsteps of our Lord and become sharers in His joy.

THE COMPLAINT, PRAYER, AND CONFIDENCE OF THE COMPASSIONATE.

(Verses 4–12.)

The relation of this section to the preceding, as we understand it, is thus stated by Hengstenberg: “The Psalmist, who, with perfect right, could appropriate to himself the words, ‘Blessed is he who acts wisely towards the poor,’ goes on to mention, in two strophes, that now it was the day of distress for him, now the rage of his enemies was boiling against him, now he was prostrated with pain, so that it was time for him to receive the fulfilment of the promise, He will deliver him,” &c.

I. The complaint of the compassionate. David had shown himself compassionate to the poor and needy, yet now that the day of his distress has come he has to complain bitterly of the treatment he received from men. Here is his complaint concerning

1. *His enemies.* He complains of (1.) *Their malignity.* “Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish?” It is scarcely possible to imagine malignity more intense than this. The malignity that desires the death of another is terrible; that which desires not only another’s death, but also the blotting out of his memory from amongst men is more terrible; whilst that which desires these things concerning a good man is most terrible. Yet such was the malignity of the enemies of the Psalmist. (2.) *Their deceit.* “If he come to see me, he speaketh vanity; his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it.” Here is the most cruel hypocrisy. These enemies visited the poet in his affliction under the pretence of friendship and kindly interest in his welfare, uttering empty and hypocritical assurances of love and

sympathy. Their real object was to gather materials for slandering him, to discover something in his temper, or speech, or condition, which they might pervert to their own base ends. And then they went abroad and published their base and dastardly perversions. “There is no fence against those whose malice thus gathers iniquity.” (3.) *Their confederacy.* “All that hate me whisper together against me; against me do they devise my hurt.” Here are combination and consultation with a view to the injury of the poet. His enemies were many, and they conspired to effect his overthrow. “Whisperers and backbiters are put together among the worst of sinners (Rom. i. 29, 30). They whispered that their plot against him might not be discovered and so defeated; there is seldom whispering (we say) but there is lying or some mischief on foot.”—*M. Henry.* (4.) *Their fiendish exultation.* “An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him, and now that he lieth, he shall rise up no more.” The first clause of this verse is not easily interpreted. Our translation is incorrect. Margin, as in the Hebrew: “A thing,” or word, “of Belial.” Professor Alexander: “A word of Belial is poured upon him.” Hengstenberg says: “The first member, literally: a matter of mischief is poured upon him.” We take it that “the matter of mischief,” or “word of Belial,” is the diabolical plan which the enemies of the Psalmist had framed for effecting his ruin; and in the anticipated success of which they fiendishly exulted. It was not without reason that David complained of his enemies.

2. *Those whom he had regarded as his*

friends. "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." "Mine own familiar friend," or "the man of my peace," indicates one who was associated with David in the most peaceful and amicable relations. "In whom I trusted," points to "one who lived on a footing of confidence with the Psalmist." "Who eats my bread," does not refer to one who had been entertained as an occasional guest by the Psalmist, but to one who was supported by him as a member of his family. "The participle points to something continued." Such an one, the Psalmist complains, had "lifted up his heel against" him, like a horse that turns and kicks a kind master. Matthew Henry, Hengstenberg, *et al.*, think that the reference here is to Ahithophel (2 Sam. xv. 12, 31). Well may David complain in bitterness of soul of such treatment. La Fontaine said: "Rare is true love; true friendship is still rarer." "In trust," said Queen Elizabeth, "I have found treason." "Friends!" said Socrates, "there is no friend."

Our Lord applied part of this verse to Judas, the betrayer, John xiii. 8. But it is significant that He omitted the words, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted." The omission is (1.) "An evidence against the direct Messianic interpretation" of the psalm. (2.) It seems to show that Christ had never regarded Judas as an intimate and trusted friend.

II. The prayer of the compassionate. The Psalmist here prays that the blessing promised to those who consider the poor may be granted unto him. He prays—

1. *For mercy.* In both the fourth and the tenth verses he cries, "O Lord, be merciful unto me." The request for mercy implies a consciousness of unworthiness. It is also an appeal to the disposition of God to pity the miserable, and succour the distressed.

2. *For restoration.* "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee; . . . and raise me up." The Psalmist recognises the intimate connection between sin and suffering. He regarded his afflictions as a consequence of his sins.

"Sin," says Matthew Henry, "is the sickness of the soul; pardoning mercy heals it; renewing grace heals it; and this spiritual healing we should be more earnest for than for bodily health." The request, "and raise me up," looks back to the cruel boast of his enemies, "and now that he lieth down he shall rise up no more." It is a prayer that God would restore him to health and prosperity, and so baffle the wicked designs of his foes. The latter part of the tenth verse is not, "in order that I may requite them," but, "so will I requite them." The words do not necessarily involve a desire for individual revenge on his enemies. They may mean simply a desire for the vindication of right and truth.

III. The confidence of the compassionate. The Psalmist expresses his assurance of,—

1. *The Divine favour.* "By this I know that Thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me." The possession of the Divine favour, and the defeat of his enemies, are in his mind inseparably associated, and he expresses a confident assurance of both. "When we can discern the favour of God in any mercy, personal or public, that doubles it and sweetens it."

2. *The Divine support.* "And as for me, Thou upholdest me," &c. The remarks of Matthew Henry on this verse are excellent. "(1.) When at any time we suffer in our reputation, our chief concern should be about our integrity, and then we may cheerfully leave it to God to secure our reputation. David knows that, if he can but persevere in his integrity, he need not fear his enemies' triumphs over him. (2.) The best man in the world holds his integrity no longer than God upholds him in it; for by His grace we are what we are; if we be left to ourselves, we shall not only fall, but fall away. (3.) It is a great comfort to us that, however weak we are, God is able to uphold us in our integrity, and will do it if we commit the keeping of it to Him. (4.) If the grace of God did not take a constant care of us, we should not be upheld in our integrity;

His eye is always upon us, else we should soon start aside from Him. (5.) Those whom God now upholds in their integrity He will set before His face for ever, and make happy in the vision and fruition of Himself. He that endures to the end shall be saved."

CONCLUSION.—Let us cultivate and pray for strong confidence in God. Then shall we be victorious over the infirmities of the flesh, the weakness or falseness of professed friends, and the scheming malignity of enemies.

DOXOLOGY.

(Verse 13.)

This verse of praise marks the close of the first book of the psalms.

I. Blessing is ascribed to God as a God holding relations with His people. "The Lord God of Israel." In the past He has conferred many blessings upon them. In the present they trust Him; and He upholds and saves them. He has promised to bless them with eternal glory. "The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel." "Blessed," *i.e.*, praised, honoured, "be the Lord God."

1. *God is supremely blessed in Himself.* "The ever blessed God."

2. *God is blessed in His works.* "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O God."

3. *God is blessed by all His intelligent and loyal creatures.* By angels, and by

the redeemed both in heaven and on earth.

II. Blessing is ascribed to God eternally. "From everlasting and to everlasting." From the unbeginning past to the unending future. What an existence is that of God!

III. Blessing is ascribed to Him fervently. "Amen, and Amen." The repetition of the "Amen" shows that the ascription of blessing is the intense wish of the mind and heart. Many and forcible are the reasons which urge all intelligent creatures thus to ascribe blessing to God.

We, whom He has redeemed from sin and hell, are under special obligation to praise and glorify Him. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" &c. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," &c.

PSALM XLII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription : "To the Chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah." Maschil, an instruction, a didactic poem.

"The sons of Korah," descendants of Korah, were an important company of singers (1 Chron. vi. 33; 2 Chron. xx. 19). Opinions differ as to whether this and ten or eleven other psalms bearing the name of "the sons of Korah" were composed by them or for them. The title may mean "*for* the sons of Korah," "*to* the sons of Korah," or "*of* the sons of Korah." Winer, Origen, Rosenmüller, Hensler, Eichorn, De Wette, Olshausen, Hengstenberg, *et al.*, hold that the sons of Korah were the authors of these psalms. Hengstenberg regards the xlii. and xliii. psalms as the composition of one of the sons of Korah concerning the experience of David; the former is the author and the latter is the object of the psalm: "one of the sons of Korah sang this psalm as from the soul of David." The psalms which bear this title are remarkable for beauty, sublimity, and intense feeling. "As, however, the language of several of these psalms—as the xlii. and xlvi. &c.—is manifestly meant to apply to David, it seems much simpler to explain the title '*for* the sons of Korah,' to mean that they were given to them to sing in the temple services. If their style of music, vocal and instrumental, was of a more sublime and lyric character than that of the sons of Merari or Gershon, and Heman had more fire in his execution than Asaph and Jeduthun, it is perfectly natural that David should have given his more poetic and elevated strains to Heman and his choir, and the simpler and quieter psalms to the other choirs."

The occasion of the composition was probably the time of the rebellion of Absalom, when David was forced into exile from his home and from the tabernacle of God. This and the following psalm stand in very close relation to each other, and were probably composed on the same occasion.

Homiletically, the psalm sets before us, A godly soul under a sense of absence from God (vers. 1-5); and the deep depression and strong consolation of a godly soul (vers. 6-11).

A GODLY SOUL UNDER A SENSE OF ABSENCE FROM GOD.

(Verses 1-5.)

I. The sorrow of a godly soul.

"My tears have been my meat day and night," &c. David here sets forth—

1. *The cause of his sorrow.* The Psalmist was driven into exile, away from home and from the tabernacle of God. And in his trials he seems to have temporarily lost the sense of the Divine presence and favour. It was probably the weight and bitterness of the trials of the Psalmist at this time which led to his inability to realise the gracious presence of God. Under severe afflictions, the soul is apt to feel itself forsaken by God. This was the cause of David's sorrow. He felt himself deserted by God. "Sometimes God teaches us effectually to know the work of mercies by the want of them, and whets our appetite for the means of grace by cutting us short in those means."

2. *The aggravation of his sorrow.* David's sorrow was made all the keener by (1.) *The reproaches of his enemies.* "They continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" His enemies seem to have reproached him with being forsaken by God; that, being exiled from the tabernacle of God, he was exiled also from God Himself; that his miseries were an evidence that he was abandoned by God. "This," says Robertson, "is ever the way in religious perplexity: the unsympathising world taunts or misunderstands. In spiritual grief they ask, Why is he not like others? In bereavement, they call your deep sorrow unbelief. In misfortune, they comfort you like Job's friends by calling it a visitation. Or, like the barbarians at Melita, when the viper fastened on Paul's hand, no doubt they call you an infidel, though your soul be crying after God. Specially in that dark and awful hour, when HE called on God, 'Eloi, Eloi,' they said, 'Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to

save Him.' Now, this is sharp to bear. It is easy to say Christian fortitude should be superior to it. But in darkness to have no sympathy,—when the soul gropes for God, to have the hand of man relax its grasp!" (2.) *The recollection of past joys.* "When I remember these, I pour out my soul in me," &c. (ver. 4.) Here is *worship*. David was a devout man. His delight was in the worship of God. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." Here is *social worship*. "I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God." His enjoyment of religious ordinances was increased by uniting in them with others. Here is *joyous social worship*. "With the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day." Their religious assemblies were characterised by devout gladness. Now, "the pain of the Psalmist is increased, when he brings into view his earlier blessedness, and places it beside his present misery." His experience is like that described by Tennyson,

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

3. *The continuousness of his sorrow.* "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually," &c. His grief was with him as a constant companion. His sorrow knew no intermission. And the reproaches of his enemies were ever ringing in his ears and agonising his heart. This tear-stained page from the autobiography of David, represents the sorrows of many a godly soul to-day.

II. *The desire of a godly soul.* "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (vers. 1, 2). Notice—

1. *The object of his desire.* "God, . . . the living God." David's great longing

was not for restoration to his palace and throne, or even to the tabernacle ; it was for realisation of the presence of God. It is quite true that "lamenting after God is as sure an evidence that we love Him as rejoicing in God." But the soul thus mourning His absence fails to realise this, or, realising it, derives little or no help from it. We are so constituted that we cannot rest out of God. Now, consider the God the Psalmist longed for. His God was a *Person*, "*Thee, O God.*" He was a *living Person*. "*The living God.*" How different from the heartless God which science and philosophy offer to men ! a God which is but another name for "law" and "order." How different also from the God of metaphysical creeds and rigid theological systems ! In these, the Divine Being is too often represented as cold, hard, far remote from men, and having little or no interest in the affairs of His creatures. The God for whom the Psalmist longed is very different. He is a living Person who takes deep interest in His creatures, who loves them and seeks their love, who listens to their prayers, and works for their salvation. This is the God that anxious and burdened men cry out for,—the God for whom the Psalmist thirsted and whom the Saviour revealed. To realise the presence and favour of this living God was the great object of desire to David.

2. *The intensity of his desire.* "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth," &c. The word translated "hart" is a common noun, but, inasmuch as it is here joined with a feminine verb, it must be taken as denoting the hind or female deer. "The Psalmist chose the hind," says Hengstenberg, "chiefly because the hind rather than the hart is suitable as compared with the feminine soul, which is like it in its weakness." And Barnes : "There is an idea of tenderness in the reference to the word hart here—female deer, gazelle—which would not strike us if the reference had been to any other animal. These are so timid, so gentle, so delicate in their structure,

so much the natural objects of love and compassion, that our feelings are drawn towards them as to all other animals in similar circumstances." We are not to think of the hunted hind, exhausted, parched, and alarmed by pursuit, but of the hind in time of prevailing drought (compare Ps. lxiii. 1). "My soul thirsteth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." The word translated "panteth"—margin, "brayeth"—denotes eager desire. So the Psalmist intensely longed for the presence and fellowship of God. His desire "is very importunate: it is his soul that pants, his soul that thirsts, which denotes not only the sincerity, but the strength of his desire."

III. *The hope of a godly soul.* "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" &c. (ver. 5). Calvin says: "David represents himself here to us as divided into two parts. In so far as he rests through faith in God's promises, he raises himself, equipped with the spirit of an invincible valour, against the feelings of the flesh, and at the same time blames his weakness." Hengstenberg: "It is the *spirit* mighty in God which here meets the trembling *soul*." Consider—

1. *Whom he hoped in.* "Hope thou in God." He turned the eye of his soul away from his painful circumstances, from the ingratitude and treachery of men, from its own troubled mood, to God. He is always the same, always gracious, always strong to save. Hope in Him.

2. *What he hoped for.* "The help of His countenance." "The salvation of His countenance." "Cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." "In His favour is life." The Psalmist hoped for complete deliverance and restoration by the favour of God. This he designates, "the salvation of His countenance."

3. *Whereon he grounded his hope.* "For I shall yet praise Him," &c. "The ground of his hope is his believing confidence that the Lord, who is always his God, will by his deliverance give him occasion for thanks."—Hengstenberg.

CONCLUSION.—Here we have a remedy for despondency. Look up and hope in God. Away from thine unhappy circumstances, away from thy

cheerless prospects, away from thine own troubled condition, look up and hope in God; and thy moan shall be changed into a grateful song.

MAN SPEAKING TO HIS SOUL.

(Verse 5.)

We have in these words—

I. Self-remonstrance. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?” “It is the *spirit* mighty in God, which here meets the trembling *soul*.” It is faith interrogating feeling. We all have had some experience of this duality in unity in our own being. We know what it is for the human soul to shrink and tremble and suffer, while the spirit, nerved by faith, is calm, fearless, and heroic. These interrogations imply—

1. *Great suffering of soul.* “Cast down,” bowed down, deeply dejected. “Disquieted,” anxious, agitated, troubled. Godly souls sometimes pass through deep waters.

2. *Groundless suffering of soul.* “Why art thou cast down?” &c. The interrogation implies that there was no sufficient reason for this depression and anxiety. The man who can call the Lord his God can never have sufficient reason to be so deeply troubled as David was.

II. Self-exhortation. “Hope thou in God.” “In God,” as contradistinguished,

1. *From man.* Man is not always willing to aid us in the day of distress. Even when he is willing, his power to do so is very limited. Man is sometimes unreliable, false. Supposing this psalm to have been written during the rebellion of Absalom, or to refer to it, David was having painful experiences of the ingratitude and treachery of men, notably in the cases of Absalom and Abithophel. “In God;” not in man.

2. *From circumstances.* The circumstances and prospects of the poet were very dark. Circumstances are sometimes as variable as April weather. They are not to be relied on. “In God;” not in circumstances.

3. *From ourselves.* We are foolish, weak, changeable. The moods of our soul are influenced by almost countless circumstances. To-day we are on Hermon; to-morrow we must enter Gethsemane. “In God;” not in ourselves. “In God;” for He is (1) *Ever gracious*. (2) *All-sufficient*. (3) *Unchangeable*.

III. Self-encouragement. “For I shall yet praise Him,” &c.

1. *The facts concerning salvation which are here suggested.* (1) *That it is the result of the favour of God.* “The salvation of His countenance.” (See preceding exposition of these words.) (2) *That it inspires the praise of man.* “For I shall yet praise Him.” The salvation of God gives both matter for praise and the disposition to praise.

2. *The assurance of salvation.* There is no faltering or hesitation in the declaration of the Psalmist. The spirit is triumphant in faith, though the soul is dejected by suffering.

3. *The ground of this assurance.* The Psalmist’s faith rests in the relation of God to him. This is brought out in the eleventh verse, which is an almost exact repetition of this one. “My God.” He who can so speak of God may well be confident of full and glorious salvation.

THE DEEP DEPRESSION AND STRONG CONSOLATION OF A GODLY SOUL.

(Verses 6–11.)

The Psalmist has addressed himself to his own soul, but has not obtained the victory over his troubles. Now he

turns to God and addresses Him on the matter.

I. The deep depression of a

godly soul. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me." He sets before us—

1. *The greatness of his troubles.* He expresses this variously. (1) *He declares his great dejection of soul.* "My soul is cast down within me." It was sinking under the weight of its trials. (2) *He compares his troubles to an angry flood.* "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts," &c. Hengstenberg says: "The floods are the roaring sea-billows of suffering and pain. Flood calls to flood, one invites, as it were, another to pour itself forth on the Psalmist." The waves of anguish were beating pitilessly upon the poet's soul. (3) *He compares his troubles to the slaughter of his soul.* "As with a sword in my bones," &c. Margin: "As with a killing," &c. Hengstenberg: "It is as a murder in my bones," &c. "The murder here is used figuratively for designating a deadly anguish of soul: the reproaches are to the soul of the Psalmist what murder is to the body. (Comp. Luke ii. 35.) 'A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.' That the murder is represented as having its seat in the bones of the Psalmist, is designed to mark the pain as going through the marrow and bones wounding the heart."

2. *The causes of his trouble.* Of these he mentions two:—(1) *His forced exile from his home and from the tabernacle of the Lord.* He was now far away from home, in "the land of Jordan and the Hermonites, and the hill Mizar." Jordan was the eastern boundary of Canaan. Hermon, a mountain on the north-eastern border of Palestine, having three summits, for which reason probably it is spoken of here as "the Hermonites" or Hermons. "Mizar" is probably the name of a small mountain; but what mountain is now unknown. But the point for us to seize is this, the Psalmist "was now driven to the utmost borders of the land of Canaan, to shelter himself there from the rage of his persecutors." He is far from home, far from the tabernacle and worship of His God. (2) *The reproaches of his enemies.* "Mine

enemies reproach me," &c. (See notes on ver. 3.)

3. *The relation of his trouble to God.* "Thy waterspouts, all Thy waves and Thy billows." He regarded his troubles as in some sense coming from God. God is either the originator or permitter of all our troubles. "Whatever waves and billows of affliction go over us at any time we must call them God's waves and His billows, that we may humble ourselves under His mighty hand, and may encourage ourselves to hope that though we be threatened we shall not be ruined; for the waves and billows are under a Divine check."—*M. Henry.*

When we consider these things we wonder not that the Psalmist was deeply depressed.

II. The strong consolation of a godly soul.

1. *In the remembrance of God.* "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember Thee." He recollected the great goodness and the mighty acts of God, and was comforted. "The way to forget the sense of our miseries is to remember the God of our mercies."

2. *In the assurance of God's constant mercy.* "The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day-time," &c. The loving-kindness of God consists, says Hengstenberg, "in the inward consolations which are granted to the Psalmist in the midst of his outward misery. In and along with the favour the song is also at the same time given. For the person who is comforted through God's favour, is enabled to sing praise to Him. Upon the song and out of it follows the prayer." "Believing expectation of mercy must not supersede, but quicken, our prayers for it." "Day-time" and "night" we understand, as in ver. 3, as indicating continuance. The assurance of the Psalmist is that God would always show him His mercy. Even in our greatest troubles there is Divine mercy. "The Psalmist called the Lord the God of his life, because He preserved and supported it, and must awaken him out of the death to which he seemed now appointed."

3. *In confident access to God in prayer.*

"I will say unto God my rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me?" &c. Notice, (1) *His characterisation of God*. "God, my Rock;" implying that God was his strength, his defence, firm and immovable. (2) *His expostulation with God*. "Why hast Thou forgotten me?" &c. To his suffering soul it seemed as though God had forgotten him. But his spirit, strong in faith, knew otherwise. The inquiry, "Why," &c., implies the conviction that God could not possibly even in appearance forget him much longer, that soon his mourning must be changed into rejoicing. Thus to have access to God is no small consolation to His people when they are tried.

4. *In the assured anticipation of deliverance from trouble*. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" &c. (See notes and homiletic sketch on ver. 5.) This verse is a repetition of ver. 5, with

this difference, instead of "His countenance" we have "my countenance," and the words "and my God" are added at the close. The idea is that when David found salvation in God's countenance or favour, the clouds would pass away from his own countenance, and it would become radiant with gratitude and gladness. "And my God" is a note of triumph in response to the enemies who had mockingly challenged him, "Where is thy God?" So the psalm closes with notes of assured and complete victory.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Here is instruction for the depressed believer*. In your deep dejection remember God, pray unto Him, trust Him. In the land of the Hermions He is as near to save thee as in the sacred worship of the sanctuary. 2. *Here is encouragement for the depressed believer*. "Hope in God; for thou shalt yet praise Him," &c.

PSALM XLIII.

INTRODUCTION.

This psalm was composed by the same author as the preceding one, and has reference to the same occasion. It is fitted to impart help and encouragement to the afflicted and desponding in their troubles. The pious spirit of the author is clearly seen in the psalm.

DEVOUT LONGINGS.

The poet pours out his heart to God in petitions, expostulations, and promises; but the prevailing tone of the psalm is that of intense desire. He longs

I. For vindication and deliverance.

"Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; O deliver me" (vers. 1, 2). Notice—

1. *The character of his enemies*. "An ungodly nation, . . . the deceitful and unjust man." The word which is translated "ungodly" is in the margin more correctly rendered "unmerciful." Hengstenberg renders it "unloving." It is a word which may most fitly be applied to the conduct of the Jewish nation at the time of the rebellion of Absalom, to which time the psalm most probably refers. In the conduct of an immense number of the people towards David, there was no love, no mercy; but base

ingratitude, injustice, and cruelty. "The deceitful and unjust man" may have been said of many at the time to which we suppose the psalm to refer, and pre-eminently of Absalom and Ahithophel (Comp. 2 Sam. xv., xvi., and xvii.) The Psalmist was contending against men who were cruel, treacherous, and unjust.

2. *The dejection of his spirit*. "Why dost Thou cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" The entire tone of the psalm forbids us to think that David felt himself rejected of God. But his circumstances at the time seemed inconsistent with the guardianship of God; and he, therefore, appeals to Him on the matter. See notes on Ps. xlii. 9.

3. *The nature of his petition*. "Judge me, O God, and plead my

cause." The enemies of the poet were many and virulent. They persecuted him and reproached him as a man forsaken by God. And here he appeals to God for vindication. He could honestly and fearlessly appeal to the Lord to judge between him and his enemies. He had given no occasion to them for the treatment he received from them. And if God grant him deliverance from them, that will be an unmistakable evidence of the Divine judgment, a clear vindication of the persecuted and much-suffering poet. So he prays that God would interpose and deliver him and thus vindicate him. For this he longs.

4. *The strength of his plea.* "For Thou art the God of my strength." Hengstenberg: "For Thou art my guardian-God." The Psalmist pleads that he was looking to God for strength and protection; that he was trusting in the Lord. This plea is never urged sincerely and earnestly but what it avails with God.

II. For restoration to the tabernacle of God. "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me," &c. (vers. 3, 4). Notice—

1. *He longs chiefly for restoration to the tabernacle of God.* His great desire is to be brought again unto God's "holy hill and tabernacles." "The centre of all the Psalmist's wishes is his return to the sanctuary, because the exclusion from that was, of all the marks of the Divine displeasure under which he suffered, the most palpable. In his return to the sanctuary, he would find a matter-of-fact justification, a pledge of the return of God's grace.—*Hengstenberg*. "His heart is set," says Matthew Henry, "upon the holy hill and the tabernacles, not upon his family comforts, his court preferments, or his diversions; he could bear the want of these, but he is impatient to see God's tabernacles again; nothing so amiable in his eyes as those,—thither he would gladly be brought back."

2. *He looks for the realisation of his longings through the favour and faithfulness of God.* "O send out Thy light and Thy truth." God's light here is equivalent to His favour or mercy,

and His truth to His faithfulness. And the Psalmist prays that through these he may be led back to the enjoyment of the privileges and blessings from which he was at present so cruelly exiled. Blessed is that man who, like David, sets his hope firmly in the favour and faithfulness of God. His hope shall attain unto splendid fruition.

3. *He promises to avail himself of the opportunities of worship when he is restored to the tabernacles of God.* "Then will I go unto the altar of God," &c. He will worship (1) *With sacrifice*. "I will go unto the altar of God," with sacrifices for sin and offerings of gratitude. (2) *With delight*. "Unto God my exceeding joy." (See the sketch on this verse.) (3) *With praise*. "Yea, upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God." Instrumental music was largely used by the Hebrews in their worship. "David excelled at the harp (1 Sam. xvi. 16-18), and with that in which he excelled he would praise God; for God is to be praised with the best we have; it is fit He should be, for He is the best."—*M. Henry*.

4. *He encourages his soul to expect the realisation of his longings.* "Why art Thou cast down, O my soul?" &c. (ver. 5). (See homiletic sketch on ver. 5, and notes on vers. 5 and 11 of the preceding psalm.)

CONCLUSION.—In this psalm the poet appears to us as a glorious example of a man whose hope is steadily fixed in God. Heroic was he in his trust in the Lord. In the first verse, we see him calmly trusting in the righteous judgment of God; in the second, he rests in God as his strength; in the third, he looks expectantly to God for restoration to his dearest privileges; in the fourth, he resolves to adore Him as his exceeding joy and his most treasured possession; in the fifth, he exults in confident anticipation of the enjoyment of all that he most deeply longed for; and all this at a time when circumstances seemed all against him, and when to the eye of sense his prospects were of the darkest. Brave, trustful poet, we cannot but admire thee! Let us also imitate him in this respect.

THE ALTAR OF GOD.

(Verse 4.)

"Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy."

The text opens to us two important views.

I. The peculiar nature of that worship which God has authorised. It is going to the altar of our God. By the altar only can God be approached. Behold, then, the true character of acceptable worship.

1. *There is in it a recognition of our sin.* There was no altar in Paradise. When John beheld a vision of heaven, he "saw no temple therein." But in the present state, in approaching God, we go to His altar. The sacrifice of Christ is made particularly prominent in the Christian scheme to remind us that we are sinful men, and cannot draw near to God in our own name.

2. *An acknowledgment of our just liability to punishment.* Worship is not a claim of right, but a plea for mercy. Sentence of death is denounced against every transgressor of the law of God, and in such a prayer as that of the publican its justice is acknowledged. The ancient offerer of sacrifice acknowledged this, and we do the same when we flee to Christ's atonement.

3. *The true worship of God recognises Him as propitious through an atonement appointed by Himself.* It was not an altar of human device to which the Psalmist resolved to go, but to the altar of his God. The cross is "the altar of God," His Son is the victim; the precious blood of Christ is the accepted atonement; and coming to Him in faith, our sin is purged and our persons are accepted.

4. *Our worship being an approach to the altar of God, we are assured of constant access to Him.* The priests had their courses, that there might be no intermission in the service. The fire of the altar was never extinct. The altar was always there to receive the sacrifice, and the altar of incense was an emblem of the acceptance of perpetual prayer. The sacrifice of Christ needs never to be

repeated. It was offered "once for all," for "by one offering He hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified." Our High Priest never dies, but "hath obtained an unchangeable priesthood." Access to the throne of grace is ever given, and our prayers are always accepted.

II. The emphatic description which is given us of the joy which results from it. "To God my exceeding joy." "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest," &c. "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!"

Contemplate the sources of this joy, that you may aspire after it.

1. *We are placed in the presence of a Being of infinite glory and perfection.* The joy in question supposes reconciliation with God, and when that is effected all our intercourse with Him may be adoring gratitude. We cannot approach the sublime of nature, we cannot be brought into the presence of an elevated character, without a deeply interested and joyous impression; but here God reveals Himself to man. Infinite beauty, glory, purity, and perfection says, "Come up to me in the holy mount;" and in answer to our prayer, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory," He makes all His goodness pass before us. David anticipated this joy (Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2).

2. *True worship enables us to appropriate this display of glory to ourselves.* There is an inexpressible emphasis in the words "My God." All His glory is ours. Is He the everlasting God? Then, because He lives, I shall live also. Is His fulness infinite? Then my supplies are secure. "All my springs are in Thee." Is He omnipotent? Then, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" And whatever other perfections He has are mine. Mine is His wisdom, His mercy, and His love.

3. *It is the joy of confidence.* The very reason why we seek God is the want of confidence in everything beside, and in Him we may confide absolutely. God in Christ assures us of this. The

philosopher tells me to span the heavens. I am an atom, a nothing. I look upon God incarnate, and all my chilling calculations fly. I am not unnoticed among His works. He came to this world, minify it as you may, to seek and to save that which was lost. When I go "to the altar of my God," I see that He is love. He that so loved me can never be indifferent to me, and can never forget me.

4. *The joy of renewed assurances of His favour to us.* Doubts and fears may oppress and chill, till we steadfastly behold His beauty in the sanctuary, and by renewed acts of faith obtain richer manifestations of His love, when our peace flows like a river. Comp. Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17, 28.

5. *There is the joy of hope.* The tabernacle was an emblem of heaven.—*Richard Watson*, abridged.

PSALM XLIV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil." See introduction to Psalm XLII.

We have no means of determining who was the author of the psalm. Nor are we able to ascertain with certainty upon what occasion it was composed. The various speculations and conjectures on the subject are not amongst the most satisfactory things with which we are acquainted. Looking at the psalm from the homiletic standpoint, we have: a well-founded assurance (ver. 1-8); a painful experience (ver. 9-16); and an earnest appeal and prayer (ver. 17-26).

A WELL-FOUNDED ASSURANCE.

(Verses 1-8.)

In the consideration of the Psalmist's confidence in God, founded upon His former doings on behalf of His chosen people, many points will arise which, without any forced interpretation, will illustrate His work for and in the soul of the Christian believer, and which are fitted to encourage our confidence in Him. We have here—

I. A commemoration of God's former and glorious doings.

1. *The nature of these doings.* "Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thy hand, and plantedst them; Thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out." The Psalmist here sets forth (1) *The expulsion of the Canaanites and the establishment of the Israelites in their land.* By the Divine power the original inhabitants of Canaan were driven from that country, and the chosen people planted therein. The figure of planting a nation or a people is frequent in both literature and conversation. We meet with it in Exod. xv. 17 and Ps. lxxx. 8. The figure suggests the ideas of *life*, *growth*, and *fruitfulness*. It is with a view to these that we plant trees. (2)

The affliction of the Canaanites, and the growth of the Israelites. "Thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out." Upon the heathens the Lord brought calamities, while He blessed His own people with increase in the land. The words "cast them out," or "spread them abroad," refer not to the Canaanites, but to the Israelites. God had extended them like the branches of a tree. We meet with the same idea in Ps. lxxx. 11. "It sent out its boughs to the sea, and its branches to the river." Barnes says that "the parallelism here clearly demands" this interpretation. This view is adopted by Alexander, Hengstenberg, Luther, De Wette, Tholuck, et al. Now, whether we view this work in relation to the nation expelled or to the nation planted and increased, it is a great work; and illustrates His work in us. It is He that casts out our spiritual foes, our inbred sins; that plants us in the kingdom of His grace; and that enables us to grow in grace. The beginning and the progress of spiritual life are with Him.

2. *The Author of these doings.* "Work

Thou didst," &c. (1) *Negatively*. "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them." It was by neither their might nor their courage that they dispossessed the Canaanites and took their land. (2) *Positively*. "But Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance." He favoured them and fought for them, or they would have fought in vain. How true is this in spiritual life! The foes of our soul-life laugh to scorn our unaided efforts to conquer them. God alone has the power to quicken us into spiritual life, enable us to grow, and vanquish our foes.

3. *The reason of these doings*. "Because Thou hadst a favour unto them." The Israelites did not merit the glorious doings of God on their behalf. We discover little merit in them, but much demerit. They owed all to God's free and sovereign favour. "Not for thy righteousness," said Moses, "or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people." God's work in us, for our salvation, is entirely due to His own free, unmerited, sovereign favour. "By grace are ye saved."

4. *The obligation of every generation to transmit to posterity an account of the doings of God in their day*. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us," &c. Generation after generation had been thrilled with the narration of God's glorious deeds of former times. "Those that went before us told us what God did in their days, we are bound to tell those that come after us what He has done in our days, and let them do the like justice to those that shall succeed them; thus shall one generation praise His works to another, the fathers to the children shall make known His truth."

5. *The obligation of every generation to profit by the experiences of those who have gone before*. We are the "heirs of all the ages," and ought to be wiser, braver, holier than those who have gone before us. History is charged with (1) *Admonition* as to the evil of sin, &c. (2) *Encouragement* to trust in God, to serve humanity for Him, &c. Are we heeding its teachings?

II. **A declaration of confidence in God.** (Ver. 4-8). This confidence is set forth, and is worthy of imitation in several respects.

1. *In the ground on which their faith rested*. It rests on what He had done for their fathers and for them in former times. Out of what He has done, their faith in what He will do grows. There is implied here belief in His unchangeableness and faithfulness. He had fulfilled His promises to their fathers; will He not fulfil them to them also? He had done glorious things for their fathers; will He not do glorious things for them also? Is He not The Immutable? God's past doings in and for us should encourage us to put strong confidence in Him. We are "confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

2. *In the relationship which He sustained to them*. "Thou art my King, O God." "They had taken God for their sovereign Lord, had sworn allegiance to Him, and put themselves under His protection." He who as the King of their fathers did put forth His power and glory on their behalf, is appealed to by the Psalmist and people as their King in expectation of protection and victory for them. As Hengstenberg puts it, "As certainly as God is the King of Israel—this His past deeds plainly testify—so certainly must these deeds again revive, must He also at the present time dispense salvation to His people." If God is our King, we may look for protection from Him.

3. *In the petition which they present to Him*. "Command deliverances for Jacob." Notice here (1) *The extent of their desires*. "Deliverances." Not one; but as many as are needed for

their complete salvation. (2) *The greatness of their faith.* "Command." Michaelis says: "Because he had named God his King, he makes use of a word which points to kingly authority and irresistible power." He has but to command it, and their salvation shall be accomplished. He speaks, and it is done. We are reminded of the centurion and our Lord. "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Let us honour God by a like faith in His power to save.

4. *In the renunciation of other objects of trust.* "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me." In ver. 3 the Psalmist declares that it was not their power or weapons that had saved them, but God alone, and in this verse he announces their abandonment of all confidence except that which is fixed in God. In the spiritual life our faith must be fixed in Christ alone for all things, for pardon, power, purity, victory, glory. From first to last we have no Saviour but Jesus, and He is all-sufficient.

5. *In their assurance of victory.* "Through Thee will we push down our enemies; through Thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. . . . Thou savest us from our enemies, and dost put to shame them that hate us." The idea of the 5th verse is that of a conqueror with his foes completely vanquished, and prostrated and powerless before him. And the 7th verse should be translated and interpreted not in reference to their past but present

foes; not to what God had done for them, but what He would do for them. They were confident of complete victory through Him. In the Christian life and conflict we may confidently anticipate victory through our Lord. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

6. *In their praise of God.* "In God we boast all the day long, and praise Thy name for ever." "Boast" is not a good rendering. Praise would express the meaning. Or as Hengstenberg translates: "God we extol continually, and Thy name we praise for ever." They extolled Him as their God, their King, in whom they confidently trusted for salvation. They resolve to praise Him, (1) *Continually.* "All the day long." (2) *Perpetually.* "For ever."

CONCLUSION. Surely this well-founded assurance in God, rising out of the recollection and celebration of His glorious doings for His people in former days, and exercised in the midst of such dark and distressing circumstances, is a thing to be emulated by us. Let every Christian believer seek to tread the path of life, perform its duties, bear its trials, and fight its battles, singing,—

"This God is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;
Whose love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.
'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come."
—Hart.

A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE.

(Verses 9-16.)

We here come at once upon a complete change of sentiment. In this and the preceding section of the psalm we have a double contrast. Here is a contrast between the exultant confidence in God expressed by the poet as the mouth-piece of the people in the former section and the sorrowful complaint of their miseries in this section. Here also is a contrast between what God had done

for them and for their fathers in time past and what He was doing for them now. Consider,—

I. *The miseries of which they complain.* Of these there are several.

1. *Their rejection by God.* "But Thou hast cast off, and put us to shame, and goest not forth with our armies." The word translated "cast off" means rejected, forsaken. We are not to sup-

pose that the Psalmist believed that God had utterly abandoned them. With the previous section of the psalm in our mind such a supposition is impossible. But judging from their outward and visible circumstances they seemed forsaken by God. The usual tokens of His favour and presence with them were altogether wanting. One of these tokens is here mentioned, "Thou goest not forth with our armies." In former times they went forth to war confident of His presence with them, and returned victorious. Now they go forth not realising His presence, and return defeated and "put to shame." (We will not attempt to decide what battles and other events in Jewish history are here referred to. Such attempts as have been made in this direction are of little worth.)

2. *Their defeat in battle and its consequent evils.* "Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy." They had no courage. They did not fight like brave men. They acted as mere mercenaries of war and cowards. "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies?" Defeat was followed by—(1) *Slaughter.* "Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat." Hengstenberg: "Like sheep for slaughter." Margin: "As sheep of meat." M. Henry: "They make no more scruple of killing an Israelite than of killing a sheep; nay, like the butcher, they make a trade of it, they take a pleasure in it as a hungry man in his meat." (2) *Spoiling.* "They which hate us spoil us for themselves." "The enemies had plundered according to their heart's desire, and without any effective restraint." (3) *Captivity or Slavery.* "Thou hast scattered us among the heathen. Thou sellest Thy people for nought, and dost not increase Thy wealth by their price." We do not affirm that the people had been literally taken captive into other lands, or sold into slavery. But some of the results of their defeat in battle had been such that they may fitly be so described. On ver. 12 Hengstenberg says—"The sense is: Thou hast given Thy people into the power of their enemies without trouble, without causing the victory even to be dearly bought,

as one who parts with a good for any price, which he despises and hates, desiring merely to get rid of it; so that there is an abbreviated comparison. Parallel is Jer. xv. 13, 'thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price.'"

3. *The reproaches of their enemies.* "Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours," &c., vers. 13, 14. According to ver. 13, the surrounding nations treated them with contempt, as a people forsaken by God, and powerless to defend themselves against their foes. מִשָּׁל, here translated "byword," properly signifies a similitude. So Hengstenberg translates it here, and explains it thus: "The misery of Israel is so great, that people would figuratively call a miserable man a Jew, just as liars were called Cretans, wretched slaves, Sardians. So far are the people from being now 'the blessed of the Lord,' in whom, according to the promise, all the heathen are to be blessed." The "shaking of the head" means that their enemies shook their heads at them in scorn and derision.

4. *Their own shame.* "My confusion is continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me," &c., vers. 15, 16. Notice here—(1) *The reason of this shame.* "For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger." The people were slandered, God was blasphemed, and their enemies were about to wreak their vengeance upon them; therefore were they ashamed. (2) *The greatness of this shame.* "The shame of my face hath covered me." "The shaming is ascribed to the countenance, because it always betrays itself, especially there." So great was the shame of the Psalmist, who speaks in the name of the people, that he represents himself as "covered" with blushes. (3) *The incessancy of this shame.* "My confusion is continually before me." There was no intermission from the sense of disgrace which they felt. Such are the deep miseries of which they complain to God.

II. *The author of their miseries.* "Thou hast cast me off," &c. Six times in as many verses they attribute all their suffering and shame to God.

He has done it all. Now a statement of this kind needs to be weighed, and its exact meaning ascertained before it is accepted. We know that "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." His great aim is to promote the well-being of His creatures. To this end all His plans and workings tend. That He should forsake His people who trust in Him is inconceivable, impossible. How, then, can He be said to be the Author of their miseries? In this way we understand it: "the meritorious cause" must have been in the people. God never forsakes His people unless they first forsake Him. There must have been some important defection on their part in their relation to God ere He would have allowed these miseries to come upon them. This being the case we can understand how the inflicting of the calamities was of the Lord. Their enemies were but the instruments by which their troubles were effected; and they could have had no power against them unless, at the least, it had been permitted them from above. And that power would not have been permitted them had there not been some defection on the part of the chosen people in their relation to God. This, then, we take to be the meaning of the Psalmist,—Thou hast done it by withdrawing the light of Thy presence and the shield of Thy protection.

III. The instruction which their miseries are fitted to afford. Three lessons, at least, stand out prominently here to which we shall do well to give heed.

1. *That God, in perfect consistency with His faithfulness and love to His people, may under certain circumstances*

withdraw from them the signs of His presence and favour, and for a time apparently abandon them to their enemies. He may do so (1) *As a chastisement for their sins.* "If his children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments, if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." (2) *For the perfecting and showing forth of their character.* The case of Job is an example of this.

2. *That when the professed people of God lose the signs of His presence and favour, they are held in contempt by the world.* Of this the Psalmist complains. When Samson had proved unfaithful, and forfeited the Divine favour, he became an object of scoffing and ridicule to those who had formerly trembled at the mere mention of his name. "If the salt have lost his savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." Here is solemn warning for us.

3. *That the people of God when bereft of His presence and help, and suffering at the hand of their enemies, do well to carry their complaints to God Himself.* (1) *Because the effort to draw near to Him is good and helpful.* It relieves the troubled heart, lessens the conscious distance between Him and their soul, &c. (2) *Because He only is able to restore the strength and joy which they have lost.* "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight."

AN EARNEST APPEAL AND PRAYER.

(Verses 17-26.)

I. An earnest appeal. Vers. 17-22.

This appeal of the people to God is based on the ground that they had not apostatised from Him. In it there are several prominent points. They assert that they have—

1. *Not broken His covenant.* "We

have not forgotten Thee, neither have we dealt falsely in Thy covenant." By this we understand the Psalmist to mean, that there had been in the history of the people no marked forgetfulness of God, nor had there been any conspicuous or prevalent departure from the

covenant which He made with their fathers.

2. *Not lapsed into idolatry.* They assert that they have not "forgotten the name of their God, or stretched out their hands to a strange God." The stretching out of the hands is significant of worship or prayer. The force of this verse is, that they have not apostatised either by worshipping a strange god, or forgetting the God of their fathers.

3. *Not backslidden from God either in heart or in life.* "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from Thy way." They had not departed from Him in their heart. They were still loyal to Him in their affections. And in their goings they followed the path which He had prescribed for them.

4. *They appeal to the Omniscience of God in proof of this.* "Shall not God search this out? for He knoweth the secrets of the heart." The "*this*" denotes the apostacy of which they had protested that they were not guilty. The force of the verse is, that if as a nation there had been any considerable departure from God, if in their hearts they had apostatised from Him unto idols, He would have known it, for He knoweth all things, even the secrets of the heart. Thus the verse is a very solemn declaration that they had not forsaken God.

5. As additional proof that their miseries had not come upon them because of their departure from God, the Psalmist says that *they were suffering severely and constantly because of their attachment to Him.* "For Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." The most conclusive proof that they have not fallen away from God is, "that they are persecuted for the very sake of God." That which perplexed the Psalmist was, that they should suffer so severely although there had not been any prevalent departure from God. Can we reconcile this protestation of their faithfulness with their miseries? Our statement on "the author of their miseries" in the preceding homily appears irreconcilable with the statements made by the poet in this appeal. Can

we explain this? and how? Matthew Henry says: "Though we cannot deny but that we have dealt foolishly, yet we have not dealt falsely in Thy covenant, so as to cast Thee off and take to other gods." "Tholuck accuses the Psalmist of a superficial view of sin (comp. on the other hand the impressive reference to the heart, vers. 18-21), whereby he was led to charge God with breach of fidelity, instead of seeking the blame in the Church. The following remarks, it is hoped, will remove the difficulty:— (1) When the Church here maintains that she had not broken God's covenant, this manifestly refers only to fidelity in the main, as to the chief matter, and manifold smaller infidelities and weaknesses are not thereby excluded. These smaller deviations justify the chastisements of God, faithfulness in the main excludes a total rejection. (2) When the Church regards the suffering that had come upon her as an anomaly, she does so only in so far as this appears to carry the aspect of *continuance*,—comp. the words: 'Cast us not off for ever,' in ver. 23. The whole of the last strophe shows, that the temptation will be at an end the moment God has, in point of fact, removed this appearance. But this would not have been the case if the suffering had formed in itself a stone of stumbling for the Church. (3) It is not to be overlooked, that we have here before us a didactic psalm. What is declared in the form of history, forms at the same time indirectly an impressive admonition. (4) We must not expect that every psalm shall fully exhibit all particular points of truth, and so render all misapprehension impossible. They rather, on the contrary, require somewhat to be supplied."—*Hengstenberg*.

II. An Earnest Prayer (vers. 23-26). We have here—

1. *Believing expostulations.* "Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?" "*Why*" seems to imply the impossibility of any reason being assigned for His sleep, and the assurance that He will speedily awake. "Faith," says David Dickson, "doth not allow nor subscribe unto carnal sense, but in presenting the objections thereof unto God, really refuteth

them, by avowing that such misregarding of His own cause and servants, as sense and temptation vented, is inconsistent with His nature, covenant, promises, and practices towards His people; for, '*why sleepest Thou,*' is as much as, it is not possible that Thou sleepest; and '*why*' here is not a word of quarrelling, but a word of denying, that any reason can be given for such a thought, as God sleepeth." "Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and forgettest our affliction and oppression?" Sense says, God is asleep and hath cast off His people for ever. Faith replies, If so, "*why*" is it so? Sense says, God hath forgotten the affliction of His people. Faith replies with a persistent "Wherefore?"

2. *Urgent entreaties.* "Awake, arise, cast us not off for ever. Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake." This is a prayer that God, who had seemed to take no interest in them, would speedily evince an interest in them and arise and save them. In ver. 12 they had complained that God had sold them; in ver. 26 they entreat Him to redeem them. "If He sell us, it is not any one else that can redeem us."

3. *Effective pleas.* (1) *Their misery.* "For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly cleaveth unto the earth." The expression of the former clause denotes great grief and fear, and the figure of the latter clause extreme prostration and affliction and inability to assist themselves. (2) *God's mercy.* "Redeem us for Thy mercies' sake," i.e., in maintenance and illustration of His character as a God of mercy. Or, as the word is plural, "mercies," may it not mean for the sake of the long line of mercies He had bestowed upon them and their fathers? Let not the long series of Thy mercies to Thy people fail, and let them not perish by reason thereof. In any case, it is an

appeal to God on the ground of His unmerited grace to save His afflicted people.

CONCLUSION.—There are here some practical points of great importance, which we shall do well to ponder in their relation to our own life.

1. *The completeness of the Divine scrutiny of human life.* There is no province of our life which escapes His examination. There is no flaw or sin, however cleverly disguised, that will escape detection when He searches us (ver. 21).

2. *The great support afforded by a clear conscience in the time of affliction.* It was no small thing for the people that in this the day of their distress they were able to appeal to God as they did (ver. 17–22). In his unparalleled afflictions, Job received immeasurable support and comfort from the possession of "a conscience void of offence toward God and men" (Job xiii. 15). And Shakespeare represents Wolsey as thus sustained in the depth of his misfortunes, and as saying of himself that he was

"Never so truly happy. . . .
I know myself now; and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience."

3. *A grand inspiration and consolation in the difficulties and disappointments of Christian life and work.* "For Thy sake." What is there that we cannot dare, or do, or suffer for the sake of our Lord, when we love Him supremely?

4. In the whole of this section of the Psalm we have a *splendid example of Faith fighting.* Here it is attacking doubt, repudiating the conclusions of sense, scrutinising life and conduct, expostulating and pleading with God. Such faith must come out of conflict victorious. Such faith may be ours. Let us seek it.

PSALM XLV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil. A song of loves."

"To the chief musician." See notes on the title to Ps. xxxix. "Upon Shoshannim" "is a musical direction to the leader of the Temple choir, and most probably indicates the melody 'after' or 'in the manner of' (על, *al*, A. V. 'upon') which the Psalms were to be sung. As 'Shoshannim' literally signifies 'lilies,' it has been suggested that the word denotes lily-shaped instruments of music, perhaps cymbals, and this view appears to be adopted by De Wette (*Die Psalmen*, p. 34). Hengstenberg gives to it an enigmatical interpretation, as indicating 'the subject or subjects treated, as *lilies* figuratively for *bride* in Ps. xlv.; the delightful consolations and deliverances experienced in Ps. lxi., &c.,' which Dr. Davidson very truly characterises as 'a most improbable fancy.' The LXX. and Vulgate have in both psalms ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀλλοιωθησομένων and *pro iis qui immutabuntur* respectively, reading apparently על משנים for על ששנים. Ben Zeb regards it as an instrument of psalmody, and Junius and Tremellius, after Kimchi, render it 'hexachorda,' an instrument with six strings, referring it to the root *shēsh*, 'six,' and this is approved by Eichorn in his edition of Simonis."—*W. Aldis Wright, in Smith's Dict. of the Bible.*

Fuerst in his *Lexicon* says on שושנים, the name of a musical choir, Ps. xlv., lxix., lxxx., identical with ששין, Ps. lx. (which see)." On the latter word he says, "עדות ששין (Ps. lx., for which Ps. lxxx. has עדות שושנים, and also שושנים alone) proper name of one of the twenty-four music choirs (1 Chron. xxv.) left by David (תודת, Neh. xii. 31), Ps. lx., so called from a master ששין (comp. the proper name ששון, 1 Chron. ii. 31), which musical guild may have been stationed in עדות = עדיתים (Josh. xv. 36).

"For the sons of Korah." See notes on the title to Ps. xlii.

"Maschil," a didactic poem.

"A song of loves," says Barnes, "would properly denote a song devoted to love, or in celebration of love; that is, in which love would be the main idea."

The author of the psalm, and the occasion on which it was written, are both unknown.

The reader who desires to acquaint himself with the various opinions as to whom the psalm refers or is applicable, we would refer to the "Introductions" to the psalm in the commentaries of Barnes, Hengstenberg, *et al.* For ourselves, we believe in its Messianic application. "The forty-fifth psalm," says Canon Liddon, "is a picture of the peaceful and glorious union of the King Messiah with His mystical bride, the Church of redeemed humanity. Messiah is introduced as a Divine King reigning among men. His form is of more than human beauty; His lips overflow with grace; God has blessed Him for ever, and has anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. But Messiah is also directly addressed as God; He is seated upon an everlasting throne." This psalm cannot "be adapted without exegetical violence to the circumstances of Solomon, or of any other king of ancient Israel; and the New Testament interprets the picture of the Royal Epithalamium of the one true King Messiah."

THE PRAISE OF THE MESSIAH-KING.

(Verses 1, 2.)

I. The reasons why He is praised.

1. *Because of the beauty of His character.* "Thou art fairer than the children of men." The Hebrew word translated, "Thou art fairer," is a very unusual expression. This word, יְפִיפִית, according to Fuerst, is the 2d person masculine of יְפִיפָה = "to be very beautifully formed," with כֵּן (more than) Ps. xlv. 3" (2 A. V.) "The irregu-

larity of this reduplicated form merely consists in this, that it stands for יְפִיפָה, the second Yod not being the first radical repeated, but arising out of the third (ה); and יְפִיפִית being put by the punctuators after the analogy of Kal." Hengstenberg gives the force of the word as, "Thou art beautiful, for, Thou art perfectly beautiful. The beauty here, since it is described in

what follows, as the ground of the Divine blessing, cannot be simply outward beauty, but only the expression and image of spiritual perfection." The beauty of Christ's character when studied as it is presented to us by the four evangelists is an exhaustless theme. We can only indicate certain points and leave them. Consider (1) *His righteousness as attested by unbelievers*. When He demanded of His enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" they were speechless. Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man." The Roman centurion said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." (2) *His association with sinners without contracting the slightest impurity*. (3) *His treatment of personal enemies*. He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (4) *His everburning hatred of sin, and His quenchless love for sinners*. (5) *His unreserved and hearty devotion to the Supreme Will*. (6) *His Divine self-sacrifice*. We can only mention these points out of many others. But, if the reader desires to see the singular and superhuman beauty of Christ's character most thoughtfully and eloquently set forth, we refer him to the chapter on "The Character of Jesus forbids His possible Classification with Men," in "*Nature and the Supernatural*," by H. Bushnell, D.D. Read the chapter, and with deeper conviction and intenser fervour, you will exclaim, "Thou art fairer than the children of men!"

2. *Because of the excellency of His speech*. "Grace is poured into thy lips." "The grace which is here specially ascribed to the lips is manifestly but a reflection of the loveliness of the speech which streams from the lips." See this when he was a child talking with the doctors in the temple: "All that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." And afterwards, when He taught in the synagogue, the people "were astonished and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom?" When certain officers had been sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to seize Him, they returned saying, "Never man spake like this man."

When He spake in the synagogue at Nazareth, "all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." Recall His words to the penitent, to the doubting, to the anxious, to the bereaved, &c. Think of His words concerning the Father, &c. Truly, "Grace is poured into Thy lips."

3. *Because of His constant enjoyment of the Divine favour*. "Therefore, God hath blessed Thee for ever." Mysterious is the union between the Father and the Son. But we know it affords unspeakable delight to the Father. "Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth." "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here, then, are the highest reasons for praising the Messiah-King.

II. The manner in which He is praised.

1. *Heartily*. "My heart is inditing a good matter." Margin: "My heart boileth, or bubbleth up." Hengstenberg: "My heart boils with good words." He speaks not the coolly calculated praise of the intellect, nor is he about to produce some beautiful work of poetic art merely, but to utter the irrepressible emotions of admiration and love. His heart is about to relieve itself in praise. Hearty praise is the only praise which God accepts.

2. *Readily*. "My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer." The heart of the poet is so filled with his theme "that he has no need to seek for words; but they flow in upon him of themselves and flow out again." In the case of the Psalmist, a full heart made a fluent tongue.

III. The excellence of this praise. "A good matter." It is good—

1. *Because of the excellence of the person praised*. It is fitting and right that goodness should be revered, that beauty should be admired, &c. He is "the chiefest among ten thousand, . . . yea, He is altogether lovely."

2. *Because of the reflex influence of the exercise upon the person offering praise*. By sincerely praising God we become like Him in those features for which we praise Him. The exercise is

transforming. As we dwell with devout admiration on His beauty we ourselves become beautiful. The praise of the supremely good is an important con-

dition of the true development of our nature, and one of the chief elements of human joy. In heaven the praise is ceaseless.

THE MESSIAH AS A MAJESTIC CONQUEROR.

(Verses 3-5.)

The Messiah is here represented as a Hero going forth to battle. He whose character is so beautiful, whose words are so gracious, is also a man of war. "The royal bridegroom," says Matthew Henry, "is a man of war, and His nuptials do not excuse Him from the field of battle; nay, they bring Him to the field of battle, for He is to rescue His spouse by dint of sword out of her captivity, to conquer her, and to conquer for her, and then to marry her." It is important to bear in mind that "the imperatives have prophetic import. The Psalmist calls upon the king to do that, which He shall surely perform."

I. The enterprise which He has undertaken. He is here represented as going forth to subdue His enemies in the world. Here are two points—

1. *Christ has enemies in the world.* "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The unrenewed man in his heart and by his deeds, if not in words, says, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

2. *Christ is engaged in the conquest of His enemies in the world.* He conquers them by converting them into His friends. He destroys rebels by making them His loyal subjects. His great work is the conversion and salvation of souls.

II. The manner in which He goes forth to this enterprise. "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Hero, with Thy glory and Thy majesty." The "sword" of the Hero is the Word of God. "The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God." "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," &c. "By the promises of that Word, and the grace contained in those promises, souls are made willing to submit to Jesus Christ and become His loyal subjects; by the

threatenings of that Word, and the judgments executed according to them, those that stand out against Christ will in due time be brought down and ruined." (Comp. Rev. xix. 15.) The Hero goes forth also in His "glory and majesty." "He has a threefold glory. His glory, as God, consists in a display of the infinite perfections and excellencies of His nature. This glory He possessed with the Father before the world was. His glory, as man, consists in the perfect holiness of His heart and life. His glory, as God and man united in one Person, the Mediator, consists in His perfect fitness to perform all those works which the office of Mediator requires of Him. This is the glory in which Christ appears, when He goes forth to subdue sinners to Himself; and this, therefore, is the glory which is meant in our text." . . . He possesses "everything which is necessary, either to satisfy the justice and honour of God, or to excite and justify the utmost love, admiration, and confidence of man. . . . He wished Him also to appear in His majesty. The difference between majesty and glory consists in this: Glory is something which belongs to either the person or the character of a being; but majesty is more properly an attribute of office, especially of the regal office. This office Christ sustains. He is exalted to be a Prince as well as a Saviour; He is King of kings and Lord of lords; and it is principally in His character of a king, that He subdues His enemies, and dispenses pardon. The Psalmist, therefore, wished Him to appear in this character, arrayed in all His awful majesty, that while His glory excited admiration, and delight, and love, His majesty might produce reverential awe, and lead sinners to submission and obedience."—Payson.

III. The Reasons for which He goes forth to this enterprise. "Because of truth and meekness and righteousness." "Truth" as opposed to all lying or fraud; "meekness" as opposed to pride and arrogance; and "righteousness" as opposed to all injustice. The King rides forth to war in the cause of the truthful, the meek, and the righteous. He wages relentless war against falsehood, violence, and injustice. His kingdom is founded and extended neither by deceit, nor arrogance, nor mere irresistible force. His reign is the reign of truth, gentleness, and equity.

IV. The success which He achieves in this enterprise. The Messiah is represented as "riding prosperously" on in His career. He advances successfully, victoriously. "Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee." With His right hand the Hero achieves deeds which strike the world with amazement and fear. On ver. 5 Barnes says: "Literally, *Thine arrows are sharp—the people under Thee shall fall—in the heart of the enemies of the King.* The process of thought in the

verse seems to be this: First, The arrows are seen as sharp or penetrating. Second, The people are seen falling as those arrows are shot forth. Third, It is seen that those who fall are the *enemies of the King*, and that the arrows have pierced the heart. . . . The reference here is to the truth, and to the power of that truth in penetrating the hearts of men." The arrows pierce some hearts with conviction, and conversion follows. But the incorrigibly impenitent will be pierced with the sharp arrows of His wrath.

CONCLUSION.—*The ultimate success of the Messiah's enterprise is certain.* 1. *The nature of His government secures it.* Truth is stronger than error; love than hatred; righteousness than injustice, &c. 2. *The march of events shows it.* Christ's ideas, principles, &c., are conquering the world. 3. *God guarantees it.* "I shall give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance," &c. "He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet." Are we with Him or against Him? Sinners, will you bow to the sceptre of His grace, or resist Him until you are smitten down by his terrible right hand? Choose ye.

THE MESSIAH'S REIGN AND JOY.

(Verses 6-9.)

We pass from the contemplation of the Messiah as a Hero to regard Him as a King. Vers. 6 and 7 are quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews in proof of the fact that the Christ is exalted by God above the angels. He certainly regards the words in the Psalm as applying originally to Christ. So that we have excellent authority for regarding the Psalm as Messianic.

I. The reign of the Messiah. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c. The Psalmist here announces—

1. *The righteousness of His reign.* "The sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre." "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom" (Heb. i. 8). Hengstenberg: "A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of Thy kingdom." The laws and administration of the

Messiah's empire are just. (1) *His rule over man as an individual is right.* All His requirements are in harmony with and tend to promote our wellbeing. In keeping His commandments "there is great reward." (2) *His rule over man in his social relations is right.* What could be more equitable or more wise than the great rule laid down by our Lord for the regulation of our conduct towards each other, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets"? (3) *His rule over man in his relations to God is right.* He requires us to obey, reverence, and love God. Is it not reasonable and equitable that the most excellent and gracious Being should be loved; that the most holy and glorious Being should be reve-

renced; that our Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign should be obeyed? "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." His reign is not only equitable, but benevolent. Moreover, the Psalmist represents the righteous administration of the Messiah's kingdom as proceeding from His own habitual righteousness and love thereunto. "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity."

2. *The perpetuity of His reign.* "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." The righteousness of His dominion and its perpetuity are closely related to each other. It is eternal because it is equitable. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." Earthly monarchs have to yield up crown and sceptre at the bidding of death; but the Messiah-King ever lives. Earthly dynasties pass away; but His empire is ever increasing, and shall for ever endure.

II. *The joy of the Messiah.* "Therefore, O God, Thy God hath anointed Thee," &c.

1. *His joy, which is here expressed by the anointing of the Father.* Alford says: "We must distinguish this anointing from the *ἔχρισεν αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ ὀνόματι* of Acts x. 38, and the *ἔχρισεν με* of Isa. lxi. 1. For it is a consequent upon the righteous course of the Son of God in His humanity, and therefore belongs to His triumph, in which He is exalted above His *μετόχους*. Again, 'the oil of gladness' seems rather to point to a festive and triumphant than to an inaugurative unction. We should therefore rather take the allusion to be, as in Psalms xxiii. 5; xcii. 10, to the custom of anointing guests at feasts; so that as the King in the Psalm is anointed with the oil of rejoicing above His fellows, because of His having loved righteousness and hated iniquity, so Christ in the jubilant celebration of His finished course at His exaltation in heaven is anointed with the festive oil, *παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους αὐτοῦ*

. . . 'Oil of rejoicing' (oil indicative of joy, as it is of superabundance: cf. Isa. lxi. 3) *beyond thy fellows* (i.e., in the Psalm, other kings) . . . We must, I think, take *μετόχους* (Heb. i. 9) as representing other heavenly beings, partakers in the same glorious and sinless state with Himself, though not in the strict sense His 'fellows.' . . . Thus only can the figure of anointing at a triumphant festival be carried out consistently—that triumph having taken place on the exaltation of the Redeemer to the Father's right hand and throne when the whole of the heavenly company, His *μετόχοι* in glory and joy, being anointed with the oil of gladness, His share and dignity was so much greater than theirs."

2. *His joy, in His bride*—the Church. "Upon Thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." The Church is here and elsewhere in Scripture represented as the Bride of Christ. Concerning the Church, two things are here indicated by the Psalmist. (1) *Her honourable position*, "upon Thy right hand." "The place on the right hand is the place of honour." In the affections of the Messiah the Church has the place which the bride has in the affections of her husband. "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it," &c. (Eph. v. 25-27). (2) *Her glorious dress*. "The queen in gold of Ophir." The gold of Ophir was proverbial for its fineness. The dress of the Church consists of the graces of character exemplified by her members. These are marked by two prominent features. *Purity*. Christians are "arrayed in fine linen clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." *Preciousness*. We owe our redemption and all our graces to "the precious blood of Christ." More precious than "gold of Ophir" are the virtues and graces of a Christ-like soul.

3. *His joy in the handmaids of Himself and His bride*. "Whereby they have made Thee glad. Kings' daughters are among Thy honourable women." The King was made glad by the distinguished persons who attended upon Him and His consort. "The number-

ing of kings' daughters among His honourable women, or maids of honour, intimates that the kings whose daughters they were, should be tributaries to Him, and dependents on Him, and would therefore think it a preferment to their daughters to attend Him." May we not discover here a prophecy that everything which is distinguished, exalted, and beautiful shall become a handmaid to the religion of Christ? Science shall bring her discoveries and lay them at the feet of Jesus, to be used for the promotion of His cause. Architecture shall put forth her noblest efforts in His service. And poetry and music, painting and sculpture, shall consecrate themselves to Him. To a great extent this is already true. One day it shall be completely and universally true.

4. *The greatness and diffusiveness of His joy.* "All Thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces." Palaces whose chambers were adorned and probably inlaid with

ivory seem to have been common amongst princes and wealthy men. Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 39; Song of Sol. vii. 4; Amos iii. 15, vi. 4. From such palaces, the maids of honour and the consort are represented as coming, to the great joy of the King. The garments smelling of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, seem to us to refer to the anointing, which was so generous that His garments were impregnated with the odours and diffused the choice perfumes around.

CONCLUSION.—We have two most inspiring facts—1. *The Messiah reigneth*, reigneth in righteousness, and shall reign for ever. 2. *The Messiah rejoiceth*, in the Father's delight in Him, in the Church which He loves, and in the distinguished handmaids who wait upon His cause. One day His joy will be complete. He "shall be satisfied." Be it ours, however feebly, to the utmost of our powers to extend His reign and enhance His joy.

THE CHURCH AND HER LORD.

(Verses 10-17.)

In these verses we have—

I. Exhortation to the Church. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear," &c. (vers. 10 and 11). This is the language of the Psalmist addressed to the Church, and the Bride of the Messiah. She is exhorted—

1. *To devote herself unreservedly to Him.* "Forget thine own people and thy father's house." "The idea here is that which we find so often enforced in the New Testament, that they who become the followers of the Saviour must be willing to forsake all for Him, and to identify themselves with Him and His cause. The strongest earthly ties are to be made subservient to a higher and stronger tie, if we would become true followers of the Saviour."—*Barnes*. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." Christ requires our supreme affection.

2. *To reverence Him.* "He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." "Let the wife see that she reverence her husband." "Christ is the Head of the Church. The Church is subject unto Christ." The Church must pay Divine honours to her Lord; must submit to His authority, and worship Him as God.

II. Encouragement to the Church. The Church is encouraged by the Psalmist to expect, if she thus reverences and devotes herself to her Lord, that—

1. *The King shall delight in her.* "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." The more we renounce all sinful and selfish inclinations, that we may please the Lord Christ, the more acceptable shall we be found in His sight. And not simply acceptable, but pleasureable. "The Lord taketh pleasure in His people." By supreme devotion to Him we may gratify the heart of Christ,—give Him joy.

2. *Distinguished peoples shall honour her.* "And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour." "In the time of the Psalmist, Tyre was probably the most wealthy and luxurious commercial town then existing; and it is referred to here as meaning that persons of highest rank, and of the greatest riches, and those who were surrounded most by affluence and luxury, would honour" the Church when faithful to her Lord. Hengstenberg translates: "So will the daughter Tyre implore thee with gifts, the rich among the people." He says: "The object of the earnest entreaty is reception into the community of the people of God (comp. Is. xlv. 5, Ps. xlvii. 9). . . . Only when the Church of God really occupies the *position* of the Church of God, can prayer be directed to her for reception into her society. The Church exercises a drawing power toward those that are without, in exact proportion to her own internal connection with the Lord. Her surrender to the Lord forms the ground of the heathen's surrender to her." When the Church is thoroughly devoted to her Lord, the world will honour her by seeking union with her. A devoted Church would speedily result in a converted world.

III. *The glory of the Church.* "The King's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold." The "*within*" is to be understood in a local sense. The bride was glorious within her father's palace. The Church of Christ is glorious when fully consecrated to Him. The glory of holiness adorns her splendidly as a garment of fine gold. Christ has given her His own glory. "The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them." "The beauty of the Lord our God is upon" her. The glory of the Church is in her faith, hope, love, patience, righteousness, holy zeal, &c. As these are expressed in her life, she honours God and is honoured by man.

IV. *The marriage celebration of the Church.* "She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework," &c. (vers. 14, 15). The figure is that of

an Oriental marriage. These verses speak of the procession of the bride from the house of her father to that of her husband. The figure probably points to the reception of the redeemed Church into heaven to be for "ever with the Lord." This reception is spoken of in Rev. xix. 7, 8. Concerning this celebration, the poet brings into view two features—

1. *Its splendour.* The glory of the bride, her clothing of wrought gold, her raiment of needlework, and her bridesmaids are all indicative of this. "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

2. *Its joyousness.* "With gladness and rejoicing," &c. Great will be the joy when the redeemed are received into the full glories of heaven. How great the joy of the bride! of the Bridegroom! of the angels! of the Eternal Father!

V. *The assurances given to the Lord of the Church.* "Instead of Thy fathers shall be Thy children," &c. (ver. 16, 17). The Messiah-King is here assured of—

1. *A numerous offspring.* The 16th "verse rests upon the custom of wishing to the married pair a numerous and mighty offspring" (comp. Gen. xxiv. 60, Ruth iv. 11, 12). Christ shall bring "many sons unto glory." "Many shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." "Lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations," &c.

2. *A distinguished offspring.* "Whom Thou mayest make princes in all the earth." "The image here is derived, undoubtedly, from the custom prevailing among kings of assigning portions of an empire as provinces to their sons" (comp. 2 Sam. viii. 18, 2 Chron. xi. 23). All who become subjects of the Messiah are invested with sovereign authority. They are "made kings and priests unto God and His Father."

3. *Perpetual praise.* "I will make

Thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise Thee for ever and ever." "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name," &c. The praise of the Messiah-

King will be eternal, and ever-increasing in fervour and depth and fulness.

CONCLUSION.—What is thy relation to this glorious Being? Trust Him, love Him, loyally serve Him, and great and endless will be thy blessedness.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

(Verse 11.)

"For He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him."

In the institution of worship we have the encouraging declaration that God may be sought, that God may be found.

Consider the nature, the reason, and the importance of religious worship.

I. Its nature.

1. *Its internal principles.* There must be reverence; . . . not, indeed, terror, but sacred awe. And as we are sinful creatures, there must be that *deep humiliation* which implies self-displacement and abhorrence. . . . The very thought of God, the recollection that we are in His immediate presence, will prostrate and humble us, if we worship Him aright. Another principle of worship for fallen man must be *trust in atonement*. Whatsoever things we ask in prayer must be in the name of Christ, believing in Him. There must be *submission*. For a rebel to worship is only mockery. Another principle is *love*. Gratitude for past mercies, . . . supreme affection, . . . delight in Divine goodness, &c.

2. *Its external manifestations.* And here we have *Acts*. As prayer,—thanksgiving,—commemoration, &c. *Places*. The closet,—the family,—the church,—the great assembly.

II. The ground and reason of worship. "For He is thy Lord."

1. This declares to us the *Divine greatness*; for the Lord of the Church is Lord of all; and, if so, the highest views are presented of His grandeur and glory. . . . Sum up all the particulars of creature-glory; collect it into one mass; it is all from Him; and He who could impart so much, has yet more in Himself. . . . If worship implies reverence and sacred awe, surely this is He to whom worship belongs.

2. As He is our Lord, He stands to us in the relation of an *absolute dominion*. We ourselves, our family, our country, our world, are all under His sway. Our life is given, supported, terminated by Him. If worship implies prayer, we see the reason for it in His boundless dominion, His absolute lordship.

3. He is our Lord *legislatively*. As He is holy and good, His will must refer to a holy and felicitous course of action. And in proportion to the wisdom, holiness, and goodness of this, must He be bound, by the perfection of His own character, to guard His law, the expression of His will, from violation. This He has done. The law is sanctioned by the penalty of eternal death. Now we have sinned against Him, and thus, do we stand in relation to His law and Himself, as guilty and condemned sinners. If, then, we have offended our sovereign Lord; and if worship implies penitence and confession, here is another reason why we should worship.

4. But to the Church may it be specially said, "*He is thy Lord.*" The true Church is a society arising from the fact of actual reconciliation to God by Christ Jesus. To this He stands in the special relation of a gracious Sovereign. And here we find another ground of the worship of the Church. There is praise to Him for His goodness,—trust in His everlasting mercy,—the thankful recognition of all His mighty and marvellous interpositions, &c.

III. The importance of worship.

1. *Wherever there is true worship, there the great fundamental truths of religion are proclaimed before the world.* The true God is proclaimed. Faith tells of the altar of the perfect Sacrifice, and the smoke of His atonement fills her

courts. Her services proclaim Christ to be the true God, and eternal life, &c.

2. *True Christian worship secures the constant publication of the Word of God.* Does any one neglect that Word at home? It is here sounded in his ears. Or does he read without understanding it? It is here explained and enforced, &c.

3. *In the public assemblies of the Church, there is the special presence of God.* "I have seen Thee," says Lord Bacon, "in Thy works, and sought Thee in Thy providences, but I have found Thee in Thy temples." Wherever two or three meet together in the name of Christ He is present with them.

4. *Public worship both presents to us the*

most perfect type of heaven on earth and furnishes an efficient preparation for it.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let us feel it our duty to uphold His worship.*

2. *Let us know and feel the evil of a careless, formal service.* "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

3. *Let us be ourselves increasingly spiritual in worship, preserving the spirit of devotion amidst all the engagements and trials of life; so shall we never be denied the blessed privilege of access to the throne of the heavenly grace; and in the manifested love of God, we shall enjoy a heaven upon earth.*—Richard Watson. Abridged.

PSALM XLVI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician for the sons of Korah." See Introduction to Psalm xlii. "*A song upon Alamoth.*" Great uncertainty attaches to the meaning of "Alamoth." Some are of opinion that it is the name of a musical instrument. Others that it is the name of a melody. While Fuerst says it is the "proper name of a musical choir, dwelling perhaps in עֲלֵמֹת, over whom was placed a מְנַצֵּחַ (director) Ps. xlii." The word occurs in 1 Chron. xv. 20, last clause, which, says Fuerst, "is to be understood *with harps over the corps Alamoth (to direct it); לְנָצִיחַ to be applied as it stands in xv. 21.*"

It is impossible to determine who the author of the psalm is. Nor are we able to say with certainty upon what occasion it was composed. We think it very probable that it refers to the threatened invasion of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, and the destruction of his army in the night by the angel of the Lord. See 2 Kings xix. and Isa. xxxvii., xxxviii. Barnes points out that "all the circumstances in that invasion—the tumultuous hosts summoned for the war (Isa. xxxvi. 2); the overthrow of numerous nations by their armies (Isa. xxxvi. 18–21); the siege of Jerusalem itself (Isa. xxxvi. 2); the confidence of Hezekiah and his people in God when the city was besieged (Isa. xxxvii. 14–20); and the final overthrow of the Assyrian host by the angel of the Lord (Isa. xxxviii. 36) agree well with all the statements in the psalm."

A TUMULTUOUS WORLD AND A TRANQUIL CHURCH.

(Verses 1–7.)

We have here—

I. **A tumultuous World.** The poet sets before us a scene of wild commotion. Kingdoms were shaking; peoples were roaring, the earth itself seemed unstable, the sea was rolling in trouble and breaking in thunder, and the firm and lofty mountains seemed to tremble with the breaking of the billows upon their base. This would very fitly describe the state of affairs at the time of the invasions of Sennacherib. That monarch has already taken "all the cities of the

tribes of Judah and Benjamin by force." Hezekiah has made considerable preparations for the defence of Jerusalem. He has "strengthened the walls, added to the fortifications, laid in great store of arrows and other ammunition, deepened the trenches, and cut off all the waters which might have supplied the besieging army." In order to avert the storm, Hezekiah submitted to Sennacherib, and paid to him an enormous tribute, for which he was obliged to strip the gold from the walls and pillars

of the Temple, Sennacherib having promised that, if this tribute were paid, he would depart in a friendly manner. And then, although he departed to the conquest of Egypt, he perfidiously left behind him a large force which marched upon Jerusalem and demanded its unconditional surrender. Thus Sennacherib, with his immense and apparently irresistible army, was spreading commotion and terror among the nations. The tumult described by the Psalmist is a picture of the commotions of the world to-day. At this moment in Europe we have the tumult of war, and the unrest and anxiety of statesmen and nations as to "the balance of power." In politics at home there are the strife and contention of parties. In the commercial world there are countless anxieties and fierce competitions. Even the religious world is not free from the noise of controversy and the din of party strife. In every realm of life there are unrest and tumult to a greater or less extent. All things here are in commotion. "What nations have passed away, like tracts of earth carried into the midst of the sea! What mighty empires, like mountains, have sunk into the abyss! What an emblem of earthly change and disquiet is the ocean! restless when most at rest; and affording no security, under its most placid aspects, against the rushing storm and the heaving surge. How much is swept away already! and there are still mountains of worldly pomp and power which at this moment 'shake with the swelling thereof.'"

1. *The tumult of the world is an evidence of the sin of the world.* In some instances it is a direct expression of sin. In all cases it is a sign of sin. The world is tumultuous because of the guilt, the selfish ambitions, the evil passions, &c., of men. 2. *The tumult of the world will one day be removed.* The great mission of Christ is to put away sin. In that mission He will certainly succeed. When sin is put away all strife and tumult will cease. There is a calm and peaceful realm where strife and commotion are unknown, because sin is unknown there.

II. A tranquil Church. The poet

sketches a scene of most delightful quiet. He shows us "a valley over which the winds sweep, and are not felt; along which the river flows and is not troubled, in which stands the city of God." We have here—

1. *An assurance of security.* "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear," &c. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved." (1) *The ground of this assurance.* (a) *The presence of God.* "God is in the midst of her." "The Lord of hosts is with us." God in the visible symbol of His presence dwelt between the cherubim in the holy of holies. The holy city was His chosen abode, and He would defend it. The Jews under Hezekiah were His people, and He would protect them. The city or people which is kept by God is inviolably secure. The Church can never suffer real loss or harm while she is able truthfully to say, "The Lord of hosts is with us. God is in the midst of us." (b) *The seasonable help of God.* "God shall help her, and that right early." Margin: "When the morning appeareth." Hengstenberg: "God helps her at the break of morning." "Distress with the Lord's people can have only, as it were, a night's quarters. Whenever the morning breaks, the Lord drives it from its resting-place, and sends another, an abiding guest, salvation. There is probably an allusion to the overthrow of the Assyrians. Then, in reality, did there stand but one night between the highest pitch of distress and the most complete deliverance, comp. Isa. xvii. 14: 'And behold at evening-tide trouble, before the morning comes, it is no more' (xxxvii. 36); 'And they arose in the morning, and lo! they were all dead corpses.'" (2) *The vindication of this assurance.* (a) *In the character and resources of God.* Character. He is "the God of Jacob,"—a God in covenant with His people, a faithful God; therefore it is wise to trust Him. Resources. He is "the Lord of hosts." He rules the hosts of the stars. The armies of heaven—the angels—loyally follow His command. And He has sovereign right and power

over all the hosts of men. "Hosts may be against us, but we need not fear them if the Lord of hosts be with us." "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (b) *In the mighty doings of God.* "He uttered His voice, the earth melted." Barnes says: "The very earth seemed to melt or dissolve before Him. Everything became still. The danger passed away at His command, and the raging world became calm." Mark the ease with which it is done. "It shall not cost the Lord any business to despatch the enemies of His people; let Him show Himself a little, let Him but say the word, and they are gone; as snow before the sun, or fat cast into the fire, so are they consumed; He uttered His voice, the earth melted."—*Dickson*. Remarkably this is illustrated in the destruction of the Assyrians.

"For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed!
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still."

In the morning one hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors lay dead upon the plain. God had spoken; and Assyria was utterly crushed, and Jerusalem was delivered. So will it be with all the enemies of the Church when God ariseth.

2. *An assurance of Refreshment.* "There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God." This figure was probably suggested by the arrangements made by Hezekiah for

cutting off the water-supply from the invading army and securing the same to Jerusalem. The refreshment and gladness afforded by the Divine provisions are set forth under the image of this river. "How fit an emblem is this of the supplies with which God blesses His Church! See it in the rich supply of truth and grace. Here flows the stream of heavenly truth, bright and pure. It has widened as it has flowed; and it now sweeps with all the fulness of the last and perfect revelation from God. Grace to apply that revelation to practical purposes is equally free. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.' See here the rich supply of grace and blessing. Here the penitent guilty are freely forgiven; here the corrupt and degenerate heart is made new, &c. Life, love, and holiness, all are given. Life, supernatural vigour, love, which connects our affections with God and heaven; and holiness, leading to present fellowship with God, and fitting us for a blissful immortality."—*Watson*. Here in the Church the "river" of Divine grace flows deep and full, and from it "streams" of blessing go forth diffusing life and joy.

CONCLUSION.—Let us seek this trustful and conquering spirit, which, in the midst of dangers and when confronted by powerful foes, confidently sings,—*"God is our refuge and strength,"* &c. Now, in the midst of the strife and storm, let us be glad and rejoice in the Lord. In due season victory and calm rest shall be ours.

CONTEMPLATION OF THE DOINGS OF GOD.

(Verses 8–11.)

The Psalmist here calls upon the people to behold the marvellous doings of God, which laid so firm a foundation for confidence in His protection and help.

I. *The object contemplated.* The Poet calls to the contemplation of "the works of the Lord," and indicates what work she particularly refers to. He speaks of the "desolations He hath made in the

earth." Hengstenberg says: "The desolation must have for its object those who had raised themselves against the people of God, and threatened to swallow them up." And Matthew Henry: "The destruction they designed to bring upon the Church has been turned upon themselves. War is a tragedy which commonly destroys the stage it is acted on." What desolations were brought

upon the Assyrians when the angel of the Lord smote in their camp one hundred and eighty-five thousand men! "*He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth.*" "The means by which God silences war to the end of the earth," says Hengstenberg, "is the overthrow of the wild conquerors and tyrannical lords." Barnes points out that "the overthrow of the Assyrian army would probably put an end to all the wars then raging in the world. The Assyrian empire was then the most mighty on the globe; it was engaged in wide schemes of conquest; it had already overrun many of the smaller kingdoms of the world (Isa. xxxvii. 18-20); and it hoped to complete its conquests, and to secure the ascendancy over the entire earth, by the subjugation of India and Egypt. When the vast army of that empire, engaged in such a purpose, was overthrown, the consequence would be, that the nations would be at rest, or that there would be universal peace." "*He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder.*" The enemies of the Church were "rendered as incapable of prosecuting their devastations, or even of preserving what they had won, as if their implements of war were destroyed." "*He burneth the chariot in the fire.*" There may be a reference here "to a custom of collecting the spoils of war into a heap and setting them on fire. This was particularly done when the victors were unable to remove them, or so to secure them as to preclude all danger of their being taken again and used against themselves. This custom is alluded to by Virgil, *Æn.* viii. 561, 562.

'Qualis eram, cum primam aciem Præneste
sub ipsa,
Stravi, scutorumque incendi victor acervos.'

The idea here is, that God had wholly overthrown the foe, and had prevented all danger of his returning again for purposes of conquest."—*Barnes*.

This termination of war and inauguration of universal peace is an earnest of what He will one day do finally and for

ever. "They shall beat their swords into plough-shares," &c. (Isa. ii. 4, and Mich. iv. 3). The Lord speed the day when the war drum shall throb no longer, and the battle flags be forever furled.

II. The design of the contemplation. There is some wise and worthy end aimed at in thus calling upon men to contemplate the doings of the Lord. What is that end?

1. *The warning of the enemies of the Church.* Let them behold these desolations, and learn that if they oppose God and His cause, however mighty they may be, they will be broken "in pieces like a potter's vessel."

2. *The encouragement of the Church.* Let the people of God look on His doings on their behalf and sing with increased force and fervour,—“The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (See remarks on ver. 7.) Let them not fear the wrath and power of any enemy; for the Lord hath said, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.” In this way history is an ever-growing aid to faith.

3. *The instruction of all.* The Lord speaks: “Be still, and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” Let the world listen and cease from war against the people of God, “which, as the foregoing fact shows, is a contest of *feebleness* against *omnipotence*, ruinous to those who undertake it.” Tumultuous world, “be still, and know that,” &c. Let the Church listen and cease to fear, for God will assuredly maintain His own cause and honour. “Be still, anxiety and fear! ‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’ Be still, apprehension! The whole world around may be disquieted; but I am God, and I rule the whole. Be still, impatience! I am God; and the times and seasons are in my power.” With such an assurance as this from God Himself, we may well unite in chanting, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore, will not we fear,” &c.

PSALM XLVII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician, a psalm for the sons of Korah." See Introduction to Psalm xlii.

The author of the psalm, and the occasion on which it was composed, are alike unknown. It is a psalm of triumph, and presents indications of having been composed on the occasion of some signal victory. Professor Alexander and Hengstenberg suggest that it was composed to celebrate the victory of Jehoshaphat over the combined forces of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites (2 Chron. xx.). The suggestion seems to us very reasonable. Reasons such as these are offered in support of it:—1. The manifestation of the hand of God in the victory, as it was obtained without any fighting on the part of the chosen people. 2. Special mention of the Kohathites as having been present in the army (2 Chron. xx. 19). 3. A service of praise to God was held in the valley before the departure of Jehoshaphat and his people (2 Chron. xx. 26), which probably suggested ver. 5 of the psalm. "From that valley God made, as it were, His ascent to heaven, after having achieved redemption for His people."

EXHORTATION TO PRAISE GOD, BECAUSE OF HIS GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD.

We have in the psalm—

I. Reasons why we should praise God. The one great general reason upon which the Psalmist bases his appeal to men to praise God is that of His reign over the earth. But he brings forward particular reasons.

1. *Because of His majesty and power.* "For the Lord most High is terrible." He is exalted infinitely above the noblest created being. He is "Most High" over all, and should be revered by all. He had shown Himself "terrible" in the destruction of the enemies of His people; therefore, let all who are not loyally subject unto Him stand in awe of Him. The justice and power of God are "terrible" to the enemies of His Church.

2. *Because of the universality of His rule.* "A great King over all the earth. . . . God reigneth over the heathen." He reigns over all kings and princes. He "bringeth the princes to nothing, He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." Over the affairs of the whole universe God is supreme. The darkness and evil He permits and curbs; the light and goodness He enjoins and originates. He has abandoned no part of the earth. He "hath established His throne in the heavens and His kingdom ruleth over all." All things are being ordered and controlled and overruled by Him for the accom-

plishment of His own wise and blessed purposes. Even the hostility of sin and sinners, and of the devil, He restrains and overrules for the good of His universe. Satan is but a vassal in the great empire of the Lord our King. Therefore let us praise Him.

3. *Because under His government the interests of His loyal subjects are specially secured.* We see this (1) *In the subjugation of their enemies.* "He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet." The people of God had just witnessed a striking proof of this. Their foes had been utterly defeated, and they had neither discharged an arrow nor struck a blow; nothing was left for them to do but to gather the spoil. The words in which the Psalmist sets forth the subjugation by God of the enemies of His people suggest two ideas. (a) The ease with which it is accomplished. "He shall subdue." The word which is here translated "subdue" (נָצַח) signifies to speak, to command, to decree, &c. God has but to utter His commands, and His enemies are discomfited. (b) The completeness with which it is accomplished. "Under us, . . . under our feet." What an illustration we have of this in the battle which this psalm is supposed to celebrate! "When Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multi-

tude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped."

(2) *In the excellence of their own portion.* "He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved." God had given to them the holy land as their portion. He selected it for them. He enabled them to take possession of it. He enabled them to guard that possession; or, as in this victory, He guarded it for them without any effort on their part. The poet speaks of this land as "the excellency of Jacob,"—literally, "the pride of Jacob." It was a land of which he would have been proud, and in the possession of which he might well have gloried. It was "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills," &c. (Deut. viii. 7-9). God in His government still has special regard to the interests of His loyal subjects. "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper." "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In this aspect of His government we have a most powerful reason for praising God and His reign.

4. *Because of the holiness of His government.* "God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness." God's government is (1) *Holy in its authority.* He has a right to reign. He is the greatest, the most mighty, the best Being in the universe. He created and sustains all creatures; He is the Father of all His intelligent creatures. On these grounds the righteousness of His authority is indefeasible. (2) *Holy in its aim.* All its laws are true and just, and are both designed and fitted to abolish all falsehood, error, and evil, and to establish righteousness and truth in all places firmly and for ever. The end of all God's dealings with our race has been to bless us in turning us from darkness unto light, and from sin unto holiness. (3) *Holy in its results.* In proportion as men yield loyal obedience to the commands of God, holiness, peace, and

joy are diffused in our world. Let all men everywhere yield hearty obedience to the Lord our King, and holiness shall be universal, and the blessedness of the race complete. Here, then, we have an urgent incentive to praise God because of His government.

5. *Because of the success of His government.* "The princes of the people are gathered together unto the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of the earth belong unto God; He is greatly exalted." We understand this as a voluntary gathering of heathen princes, that they may be received among the people of the Lord. "All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him." "He shall speak peace unto the heathen; and His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." The government of the Lord shall not fail, but succeed gloriously. He is the rightful Sovereign of all the mighty ones. That right shall be completely established. All powers shall own His supremacy. He shall be greatly exalted. That which to the eye of the poet was present as he closed this psalm shall one day be fully and splendidly realised. Here, then, we have another reason for praising God for His government. It shall succeed, and all men shall enjoy its blessings. Some would limit the "all ye people" of the first verse to the Jewish people. There is no need to do that, for the time is hastening on when all the people from all lands will gladly respond to the exhortation of the Psalmist, and praise God for His government of the world.

II. Directions how we should praise God.

1. *Enthusiastically.* "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises," &c. In the fifth verse the poet represents God as having come down to earth to aid His people in the war, and having wrought salvation for them, returning to heaven amid the enthusiastic rejoicings of the people. There is perhaps a reference to the thanksgiving on the

field of battle, and the joy with which Jehoshaphat and his people returned to Jerusalem (2 Chron. xx. 26-28). Certainly this poetical statement, and the exhortations of the Psalmist, urge us to enthusiasm in the praise of our King and God. The clapping of the hands for joy, the shout of triumph, the blast of the trumpet, and the voice of song, are all called for by the poet in this celebration. Let not our praise of our Redeemer and King be measured, cold, and heartless, but hearty, warm, and enthusiastic. If we are rightly sensible of what He has done for us, we shall feel that even

"Eternity's too short
To utter all His praise."

2. *Intelligently.* "Sing ye praises with understanding." Margin: "Every one that hath understanding." But neither the textual nor the marginal rendering expresses the meaning of the Hebrew. The word is מַשְׁכִּיל, *maschil*. "Sing a *maschil*." Hengstenberg: "Sing a song with edification." Their praise of the King was to be intelligent and instructive. "Every song in praise of God, on account of His glorious deeds, contains a rich treasure of instruction and improvement. Here the instruction

which should be drawn out of the foregoing deeds is expressly declared. It is this, that God is King over the whole earth, that He reigns over the heathen, that these shall also some time own His sovereignty." St. Paul in like manner exhorts Christians to pray and "sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also," that the Church might be edified. If others are to be edified by them, our praises must be intelligent.

CONCLUSION. — Are we praising or rebelling against this government? Consider, sinner, the *wickedness* of thy rebellion. This government is perfectly holy, and is exercised to bless men. Rebellion against it is sin against all that is true and right and good in the universe. Consider the *madness* of thy rebellion. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered?" "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." You must yield to be saved by His grace, or be crushed by His power and wrath. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry," &c. Cease your rebellion; accept the mercy of the King; serve Him as a loyal subject; and unite in praising Him because of His glorious government of the world.

THE CHOICE OF OUR INHERITANCE.

(Verse 4.)

This verse presents to us three matters for consideration.

I. *Distrust of self.* We would not choose our own inheritance because of,

1. *Our ignorance.* (1) We are to a great extent ignorant of *ourselves*. Possibilities of both good and evil are latent within us which God only knows. If the choice of our lot were with us, we might choose such an one as would tend to crush the true and good in us, and to quicken the evil into awful and ruinous development. God alone thoroughly understands our heart. (2) We are ignorant of the *future*. We know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. The choice which amid the circumstances of to-day seems wise and good, amid those of to-morrow may seem evil and

painful. God alone thoroughly knows what is before us in the future.

2. *Our proneness to self-indulgence.* We are apt to choose the pleasant rather than the painful, the bright rather than the dark, &c. And yet the dark and painful may be good for us, and quite essential to our wellbeing. We dare not choose our own inheritance.

II. *Trust in God.* "He shall choose our inheritance for us." Committing freely the choice to Him implies confidence,—

1. *In His wisdom.* "His understanding is infinite." "The only wise God." He cannot err.

2. *In His goodness.* Unless assured of this we could not thus commit the choice of our inheritance to Him. "The Lord is gracious," &c. (Ps. cxlv. 8, 9).

3. *In His interest in us individually.* Before we can heartily trust God as to the appointments of our life and lot we must have a persuasion of His knowledge of us and interest in us individually. We have this. "He calleth His own sheep *by name*." No act of kindness rendered even "unto one of the least of the brethren" of our Lord is overlooked by Him. He never loses sight of the particular in the general, or of the individual in the community. So we trust in Him. "He shall choose," &c.

III. *Trust in God rewarded.* "The excellency of Jacob whom He loved." He chooses an inheritance for us such as

Jacob might have been proud of and rejoiced in. And He who chooses also *bestows the inheritance*. What a precious spiritual heritage is ours in the present! pardon, purity, peace, sustaining and sanctifying grace! &c. And for temporal and material things we have the assurance that "no good will He withhold from" us. What a glorious heritage awaits us in the future! He hath chosen for us "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," &c. And He will bestow it upon us.

Thankfully and gladly let us accept in all things His wise and gracious ordering of our life and affairs.

PSALM XLVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription: "A Song and Psalm." "It is not easy," says Barnes, "to account for this double appellation, or to distinguish between the meaning of these words, though *probably* the real distinction is that the word *Psalm* refers to that to which it is applied, considered merely as a *poem* or *composition*; *Song* is applied with reference to its being *sung* in public worship." "It embraced what was usually understood by the word *Psalm*, and it was intended also specifically to be *sung*."

"*For the sons of Korah.*" See Introduction to Ps. xlii. The author of the psalm is unknown. Professor Alexander, Hengstenberg, and others suppose that this psalm has reference to the same event as the previous one, a supposition which seems to us very probable. They suggest that that was sung on the field of battle (2 Chron. xx. 26), and this on the triumphant return to Jerusalem and to the temple (2 Chron. xx. 28). Homiletically we regard the psalm as presenting, A Striking Illustration of the Glory of the Church (vers. 1-7); and an Instructive Illustration of the Glory of the Church (vers. 8-14). Or we may express the subjects thus, The Glory of the Church as manifested by God's doings on her behalf; and, The Improvement to be made by the Church of God's doings on her behalf.

A STRIKING ILLUSTRATION OF THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

(Verses 1-7.)

The remarkable victory wrought on behalf of Jehoshaphat and his people leads the poet to celebrate the praises of God and of the holy city which He had protected. That holy city represents the Church of God. The poet sets forth the glory of the Church in three main aspects—

I. *As the city of God.* "The city of our God; . . . the city of the great King." Two characteristics are brought forward to distinguish it as "the city of God."

1. *God manifests His greatness and glory there.* "Great is the Lord, and exceedingly glorious in the city of our

God." His greatness He had displayed in overthrowing the mighty and combined enemies of His people; and His glory was manifested in the temple, with its solemn and stately services, its multitudes of devout worshippers, its revelation of Himself in the law and in the sacrifices, and especially in the mysterious and ever-radiant Shekinah. "The Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation," &c. So, in this Christian dispensation, it is in the Church that the glory of God is most clearly and brightly manifested. I see much of His glory in nature. "The heavens declare the glory of God,"

&c. But I see more in the conversion of sinners, in the spiritual education of Christian believers, in the holy lives and self-sacrificing labours of the followers of Christ, &c. Christ is the highest and fullest revelation of God; and He specially dwells in the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name," &c.

2. *It is hallowed by His presence.* "The mountain of His holiness." P. B. V.: "Upon His holy hill." Hengstenberg: "Upon the holy mountain." Mount Zion was regarded as holy because the temple of God was built upon it. It was hallowed by its sacred uses and associations. The Church of Christ is described by St. Paul as "an holy temple" (Eph. ii. 21). Again, he writes, "The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." The glory of the Church is in the realisation of the presence of God in the hearts, and its manifestation in the lives of its members. The only glorious Church is the God-inspired, Christ-like Church.

II. *As exalted before men.* "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion," &c. (ver. 2). "What is there," says Dr. Thomson, "or was there about Zion to justify the high eulogium of the Psalmist? The situation is, indeed, eminently adapted to be the platform of a magnificent citadel. Rising high above the deep valley of Gihon and Hinnom on the west and south, and the scarcely less deep one of the Cheesemongers on the east, it could only be assailed from the north-west; and then, 'on the sides of the north,' it was magnificently beautiful, and fortified by walls, towers, and bulwarks, the wonder and terror of the nations." And Dean Stanley says: "As in Judah no rival city ever rose till the time of the Herods, the whole splendour of the southern monarchy was concentrated in Jerusalem, and contributed to that magnificence which has before been described as probably excelling any sight of the kind within the Holy Land." "The joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion." "From the time of Constantine to the present day, this name has been applied to the

western hill, on which the city of Jerusalem now stands, and in fact always stood. Notwithstanding this, it seems equally certain that, up to the time of the destruction of the city by Titus, the name was applied exclusively to the eastern hill, or that on which the temple stood." — *Smith's Dict. of the Bible*, art. *Jerus.* But we must not fix our attention solely or even chiefly on the material situation. As Hengstenberg says: "The key for the exposition of ver. 2 is found in the remark that the Psalmist describes not the external but the internal glory of Jerusalem, views it not with fleshly eyes but with the eye of faith,—speaks not as a geographer but as a divine." By "the whole earth," the Psalmist probably meant the whole land of Palestine. By its celebrations of the worship of God, by the great assemblies of the people at the great religious feasts, and by the recent victory over the foes of Judah, Jerusalem was conspicuously exalted before men. The Church of Christ, when animated by the Spirit of her Lord, and arrayed in the beauties of holiness, is distinguished and honoured before men. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." When the Church reveals God to the world, the whole earth has reason to rejoice because of her.

III. *As victorious over enemies.* "For, lo, the kings were assembled," &c. (verses 4-7). Notice—

1. *The gathering of the foes.* The kings which gathered themselves together against Jehoshaphat were those of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, and perhaps others who are not specified. They "were gathered together against Jerusalem. They came into the immediate neighbourhood of the city, into the wilderness of Tekoa, which is certainly not further than a journey of three hours from Jerusalem, which commands an extensive prospect, and in particular of the environs of Jerusalem." What foes are gathered against the

Church of Christ to-day? *Superstition*, in Roman Catholicism, Sacramentarianism, Ritualism, &c. *Scepticism*, which is to a great extent the product of superstition. *Worldliness*, the insatiable craving for increase of material wealth, the slavish obedience to custom and fashion as though they were of supreme authority, &c. *Sensuous self-indulgence*. These and other foes are gathered together against the Christian Church of our day.

2. *The dispersion of the foes*. "They passed by together. They saw, so they marvelled," &c. Consider (1) *The manner in which the dispersion was effected*. It was marked by (a) *Suddenness*. "They passed by together." Hengstenberg: "They vanished altogether." They "hasted away." Their overthrow was so sudden that they, as it were, vanished from sight. (b) *Alarm*. "Fear took hold upon them there." Hengstenberg: "They saw, so they were astonished, were frightened, fled away; Trembling took hold on them there." They came within sight of the city; but, before they could strike a blow, terror seized upon them, they were filled with consternation. (c) *Distress*. "Pain as of a woman in travail." This comparison is used here, as elsewhere in Scripture, to denote the severest kind of pain. Julius Cæsar announced to the senate his victory over Pharnaces in the following brief despatch.—"*Veni, vidi, vici*." But the general of the forces that had gathered together against Jerusalem might well have summed up the history of their expedition thus.—"*Veni, vidi, victus sum*." (2) *The agent by whom the dis-*

persion was effected. "God is known in her palaces for a refuge. . . . Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." God had scattered the forces that had gathered together against Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat and his army struck not a single blow in the warfare (2 Chron. xx. 22–24). The breaking of the ships of Tarshish is mentioned here as an illustration of the almighty power of God. "The occasion," says Hengstenberg, "that gave rise to this comparison is recorded in 1 Kings xxii. 48; 2 Chron. xx. 36, 37. Jehoshaphat had united with Ahaziah in getting ships of merchandise, but the ships were wrecked. The internal connection between the two events was the greater, as in that annihilation of the ships of Tarshish, there was discerned, according to 2 Chron., a judgment of God." So as regards the enemies of His Church God Himself will scatter them. The more God is realised "in her palaces for a refuge," the more completely and gloriously victorious will the Church be over all her enemies. Superstition and scepticism shall be conquered by the truth of God. Worldliness and self-indulgence shall be vanquished by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Herein, then, is the true glory of the Church. Not in her splendid edifices, or social prestige, or immense endowments, or gorgeous ritual, or eloquent ministry. But in the manifest presence of God in her midst,—manifest in holy living, and self-denying working, in the sublime victories of faith and love over her foes, and in unflinching loyalty to her king and God.

AN INSTRUCTIVE ILLUSTRATION OF THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

(Verses 8–14.)

In these verses the Psalmist points out the use and improvement which the Church should make of the doings of God on her behalf. Those doings not only displayed the glory of the Church, but were rich in instruction for the Church. The Psalmist exhibits them,—

I. As a confirmation of faith. "As

we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever." The event which they had witnessed had vindicated their former trust in God, and encouraged them to trust Him for the future. But as for Jerusalem, her towers have long since fallen

to the ground, her bulwarks have been overthrown, her palaces have crumbled to dust, her holy and beautiful temple has been utterly demolished. But these things are only an apparent contradiction of the assurance, "God will establish it for ever." "The Jerusalem that has been laid in ruins is not that which the Psalmist means; it is only its lifeless corpse." The Church of Christ is founded upon the rock, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Every additional illustration that we have of the faithfulness of God, whether to us individually or to the Church, should encourage us to continued and increased confidence in Him.

II. As an incentive to meditation on the grace of God. "We have thought of Thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple." We have here—

1. *An excellent theme for meditation.* "Thy loving-kindness." It had been very fully manifested in the victory which He had achieved for Judah. But to us God has given still brighter displays thereof. God's loving-kindness is the source of all our blessings.

2. *A suitable place for meditation.* "In the midst of Thy temple." "It is evident that the psalm was sung as a song of thanks in the temple." "When we enjoy the benefit of public ordinances undisturbed, when we meet in His temple and there is none to make us afraid, we should take occasion thence to think of His loving-kindness."—*M. Henry*. It is both our interest and our duty to meditate upon God's gracious dealings with us. Gratitude urges us to ponder every fresh proof of His goodness to us. And as it is necessary to digest our food for it to nourish and strengthen our bodies, so God's mercies must be spiritually digested by means of meditation, if they are to prove helpful to the spiritual life. By meditation we realise their greatness and their significance; we feel our obligation to God, and are encouraged to trust Him by reason of them.

III. As a stimulus to praise God.

1. *In the Church.* "Let Mount Zion rejoice," &c. (ver. 11). This is a call

to all the cities of Judah to joyous praise. The manifestation of the favour of God should always rejoice the hearts of His people.

2. *Beyond the Church.* "According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth." The idea of the Psalmist seems to be that, wherever the doings they were celebrating were known, men would be so impressed with the "name" or character of God that they would praise Him. The best commentary on the words of the Psalmist is the result on the nations of the victory achieved on behalf of Jehoshaphat. "The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of the countries when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about" (1 Chron. xx. 29, 30). It is noteworthy that in the praise of God, both in the Church and beyond the Church, the righteousness of His doings is recognised. The chosen people were "glad because of His judgments." And in His praise among the nations it is observed that His "right hand is full of righteousness." Just and true are all His ways. All His doings are in complete accord with eternal and immutable righteousness.

IV. As a reason for considering the security and beauty of the Church. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her," &c. (vers. 12, 13).

1. *The survey to which the Psalmist exhorts the people.* The "towers" were for observation and defence; the "bulwarks" were the outermost circumference of the city, and in this place they are in contrast to the palaces in the interior. The exhortation of the Psalmist is to a thorough survey of the city, that the people may see how entirely free from injury it was, and how capable of resisting the attacks of foes.

2. *The design of the survey.* "That ye may tell it to the generation following." "One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts." By this means the generation following may be encouraged to put their trust in the Lord. In this

way one generation may render valuable service to another. So the testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God grows more voluminous and convincing with every generation. Let us survey the Church of Christ, and mark its beauty and security. "What precious ordinances are its palaces, what precious promises are its bulwarks" and towers! Its foundations are immovably and eternally secure. It is guarded by the incessant vigilance and almighty power of God, and need not fear the gates of hell. Let us tell to the generation following our impressions and experiences of the Church of Christ, that they may be led heartily to seek citizenship therein.

V. As an encouragement to triumph in God. "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even

unto death." Here are two reasons for triumph in God.

1. *His relations to us personally.* "Our God, . . . our guide." He guides us (a) by the counsels of His word; (b) by the influences of His Spirit; (c) by His providential interpositions; (d) by special help in special trials; (e) by shedding light upon our path when in perplexity and doubt; and (f) by support and direction when we tread that dark and, to us, unknown way which conducts to the grave."—Barnes.

2 *His relations to us permanently.* "For ever and ever; . . . unto death." His love to us and care for us are constant and unchangeable. He will guide and protect us even to the last.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the citizens of Zion rejoice in their privileges.* 2. *Let her enemies submit themselves to her King.*

PSALM XLIX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician, a psalm for the sons of Korah." See Introduction to Psalm xlii. Both the author of the psalm, and the occasion on which it was composed, are unknown. "This psalm," says Matthew Henry, "is a sermon, and so is the next. In most of the psalms we have the penman praying or praising; in these we have him preaching; and it is our duty, in singing psalms, to teach and admonish ourselves and one another." "The psalm meets the temptation, which arises to the righteous from the prosperity of the wicked (whose persecution it sets forth), with the very consolation which is presented for it throughout the Old Testament, viz., that the issue divides between the righteous and the wicked, that the glory and ascendancy of the latter are only temporary, that they end in terrors, while the righteous is delivered by God."—Hengstenberg.

THE PREACHER OF WISDOM.

(Verses 1-4.)

The Psalmist appears as a preacher discoursing of wisdom, and in these verses, which are introductory to the main theme, he calls the attention of all men to what he is about to say. It was not of wisdom in general, but of wisdom in estimating the value of worldly wealth and honour, that he was about to speak.

I. The preacher of wisdom addresses himself to all peoples. "Hear this, all people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world." This summoning all men to attention implies—

1. *The great importance of the subject.* It is common in Scripture when im-

portant announcements are made to call the whole world to listen (Deut. xxxii. 2; Ps. l. 1; Mic. i. 2). How important is the message of the Gospel Preacher!

2. *The universal applicability of the subject.* The statements he was about to make pertained not to one nation or race only, but to all mankind. The gospel of Christ pertains to the whole race of man. All men need the gospel. The gospel is sent to all men. "Go ye into all the world," &c.

II. The preacher of wisdom addresses himself to all classes. "Both

low and high, rich and poor together." "What the Psalmist has delivered, serves to the rich for warning, to the poor for consolation." The poor are in danger from the inordinate desire of wealth, and the rich from an inordinate delight in it. Let the poor neither fear nor envy the rich; let the rich neither trust nor boast in their riches. The message of the Christian preacher is to all classes. The gospel is addressed to man as man, without regard to any distinctions of wealth or rank.

III. The preacher of wisdom duly considers his subject. "The meditation of my heart shall be of understanding." "The idea is," says Barnes, "that he had meditated on the subject, and that he would now give utterance to the result of his meditations." And Matthew Henry: "It was what he had himself well digested. What his mouth spoke was 'the meditation of his heart;' it was what God put into his mind, what he had himself seriously considered, and was fully apprised of the meaning of and convinced of the truth of." "I will incline mine ear to a parable," saith the Psalmist, implying clearly that the wisdom he was about to "communicate is no self-sprung possession, but one that has been *acquired* by him."

משל = similitude, parable, proverb. Hengstenberg translates it here, "similitude." And Fuerst; a "sententious poem." "The Psalmist will incline his ear to it. This intimates—1. That he was taught it by the Spirit of God and did not speak of himself. Those that undertake to teach others must first learn themselves. 2. That he thought himself nearly concerned in it, and was resolved not to venture his own soul upon that bottom which he dissuaded others from venturing theirs upon. 3. That he would not expect others should attend to that which he himself did not attend to as a matter of the greatest importance. When God gives the tongue of the learned He first wakens the ear to hear as the learned."—*M. Henry*. An unthoughtful ministry is a great curse. Meditation, patient and earnest thought, should ever precede the speech of the preacher.

IV. The preacher of wisdom deals with difficult questions. "Dark sayings." "חִידָה = entwined, hence, (a) *cunning, trickery* (Dan. viii. 23), i.e. *disimulation*. (b) *enigmas, riddles* (Judg. xiv. 12). (c) *pointed, enigmatical speech that surprises, a proverb* (Prov. i. 6); a *parable* (Ezek. xvii. 2); *poesy* (Ps. xlix. 5); or *oracle*" (Num. xii. 8).—*Fuerst's Lexicon*. It seems to us to mean in this place something which was obscure, or only imperfectly understood. Hengstenberg explains it thus: "riddle, a discourse of difficult comprehension, of deep sense." There are "dark sayings," difficult questions, in—1. *The Scriptures*, in which there are "things hard to be understood," not a few. 2. *The Providence of God*. "Thy way is in the sea," &c. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." 3. *Every human life*. "Man's soul is written all over with dark sayings." The preacher deals with these "dark sayings;" looks into them, exhibits their uses, explains their significance, endeavours to make them clear and luminous.

V. The preacher of wisdom deals with difficult questions poetically, musically. "I will open my dark saying upon the harp." He would speak them in poetry, and attune them to music. "The most sorrowful people have known most and felt most the soul of music. The expression of the sorrows and aspirations of the soul in music ministers to our reserve, while it also flows forth in a stream, sad in itself perhaps, yet productive of a divine cheerfulness. There is a mystery and a meaning in music we can never either expound or explore; and it is felt that those natures, which are the greatest burden and mystery to themselves, find most the solace of song in the combinations of all great sounds; we have known this, it is not always that in joyfulness of heart we sing. The girl oppressed by some great trial or loss, as she bends over her needle, or goes about her house-work, will sing; and while she sings, finds unconsciously that her song has been her medicine, and has given to her relief. I have known a woman, disappointed and forsaken, flying to her

piano; her fingers rushing over the keys have given liberation to her spirit, and the chords opened the sealed well of tears, and the rains descended, and the floods came. And something like this is a very general experience. Hence we have poetry for all cultured people, and hymns for holy people; and do we not know what it is to become happy while we sing? Good it is sometimes

to utter the dark saying to the harp rather than to others; it composes, allays, and tranquillises the mind while we utter it."—*E. P. Hood.*

CONCLUSION. Let us learn how to deal with our dark sayings. Seek light and help in worship. Devotion will illuminate the mind. Intellectual difficulties will vanish before the religious fervour of a grateful and reverent heart.

THE FOOLISH WAY OF WEALTHY WORLDLINGS.

(Verses 5-15.)

I. The characteristics of their way. Their way is marked by—

1. *"Trust in their wealth."* They place confidence in their riches as the source of all good to them, and the means by which all their wants may be supplied and all their desires gratified. "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God." "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

2. *Boasting in their wealth.* "Boast themselves in the multitude of their riches." They pride themselves in the extent of their possessions. "Many years ago Judge B. resided in New Jersey. His family was considered the most aristocratic in the town; and not unfrequently some of its members would give their acquaintances to understand that this was their opinion also. On a certain occasion a fishing-party was made up among the ladies. Mrs. Judge B. was one of the number. While fishing, the subject of losing property was discussed. Mrs. B. paused a little, and slipped a splendid gold ring from her finger, and dropped it into the lake, remarking as she did so, that it was 'as impossible for them to become poor as it was for her to recover that ring.' The party returned to their homes, and Mrs. B. gave her fish to the servants. Not long after, the cook came into the sitting-room and showed to Mrs. B. a gold ring that she had taken from one of the fish. *The ring dropped into*

the lake was recovered. Mrs. B., who was so confident that she could never become poor, died a pauper in Elizabeth-town, Nova Scotia; and her husband, the judge, died a pauper also in an adjoining town."—*Dict. of Illus.*

3. *Fancied power to retain wealth.* "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever," &c. (ver. 11). They calculated that they should retain their possessions until death, and then transmit them to their children. There are few wealthy persons who realise the uncertain tenure by which they hold their possessions. The great majority seem to regard themselves, not as stewards, but as proprietors of their possessions, and as able to retain or dispose of them as they please.

II. The folly of their way. "This their way is their folly." Their folly is seen in—

1. *Their inability to retain their wealth.* All men must die, "and leave their wealth to others." "(1) They cannot continue with it, nor will it serve to procure them a reprieve. (2) They cannot carry it with them, but must leave it behind them. (3) They cannot foresee who will enjoy it when they have left it; they must leave it to others, but to whom they know not, perhaps to a fool (Eccles. ii. 19), perhaps to an enemy."—*M. Henry.* "Riches," says Gataker, "though they have great eagles' wings, to fly away from us while we are here in this world, yet have not so much as little sparrows' wings to fly after us and follow us when we go hence. We brought nothing into this

world, neither shall we carry anything hence." Even before the rich man passes away from this world, his riches may pass away from him. A storm at sea, a spark of fire, a flood, &c., may transform him into a beggar. How foolish, then, to trust and glory in wealth!

2. *The limitation of the power of wealth.* The wealthiest man has no power (1) *to turn aside the stroke of death even from his dearest friend.* "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." The wealthiest of men is unable to prolong by an hour the life that is most dear to him. "Redeeming, he cannot redeem;" that is, according to Hebrew usage, he cannot possibly do it; it cannot be done." "What folly is it to trust to that, and boast of that, which will not enable us so much as for one hour to respite the execution of the sentence of death upon a parent, a child, or a friend that is to us as our own soul!" The wealthiest man has no power (2) *to turn aside the stroke of death from himself.* "Wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person." "No matter what may be the character of the man of wealth, whether wise or foolish, he must certainly die. His wealth cannot save him from the grave." It is said that a queen of England, knowing that her death was at hand, cried, "A million of money for a moment of time," and cried in vain. (3) *Wealth has no power to favourably affect the condition of its possessors after death.* "Like sheep they are laid in the grave," &c. (ver. 14). When death comes to them, all their possessions and honours must be relinquished finally and for ever. Then the superiority of the portion of the upright will be apparent. All the strength and beauty of wealthy worldlings shall be consumed; but "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." He who, when upon earth, was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day," could not obtain so much as a drop of cold water in hell. How great, then, is the folly of putting our

trust in and making our boast of our wealth! And yet, notice how continuous this folly is. "This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings." In this folly there is a sad successiveness. The children tread in the footsteps of their fathers. "They adopt their principles, and act on their maxims; and, attaching the same importance to wealth which they did, seek, as they sought, to perpetuate their names upon the earth."

And now turning our attention from the wealthy worldling to "the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him," two remarks are justified.

First: *The godly man has no reasonable cause to fear the power of the wealthy worldling.* "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?" It is difficult to get any reasonable meaning out of the last clause as it is rendered in our version. We take it that the word here rendered "heels" — עקב is from the verb עקב, and signifies a persecutor or liar-in-wait; and so we should translate, "When the iniquity of liars-in-wait compass me about." See Fuerst's Lexicon. The Psalmist was exposed to danger by reason of the crafty designs of his wealthy enemies; but why should he fear them? With all their wealth, how powerless were they! What could they do to him, they who were weak mortals like himself? They were leaning on a broken reed, and boasting in a shadow. He had no reason to fear them; for his trust was in the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength.

Second: *The portion of the godly man is far superior to that of the wealthy worldling.* "The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. . . . God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for He shall receive me." The superiority of the portion of the upright consists in this—

1. *They shall not be held in Sheol.* God will rescue them from the power of the grave. They shall arise to a life of blessedness.

2. *They shall be received by God.* God will receive His people into glory, both soul and body, at the resurrection. So shall they ever be with the Lord.

This superiority will soon be made manifest. "In the morning," i.e. in a little time. The night will speedily pass away, and "in the morning" the vanity of the portion of wealthy worldlings and the excellence of the portion

of the godly will be clearly manifested.

CONCLUSION.—1. My rich brother, "trust not in uncertain riches;" but use thy wealth wisely, and it shall prove a blessing to thyself and to others. 2. My poor brother, do thou neither envy nor fear the power of wealthy worldlings; but rejoice in thine own inalienable and blessed portion.

REDEMPTION.

(Verse 8.)

I. The subject of redemption. To acquire right views of the importance of redemption as to its subject, we may glance at the powers, the affections, and the duration of the soul.

1. *Its powers.* (1) *It is endowed with the faculty of knowledge.* Paul tells us that knowledge is a feature of the image of God. The object of redemption is not mere matter, but an intelligent being, the only being on this earth capable of apprehending the discoveries which God has made of Himself. (2) *It is endowed with the power of choice.* Man is a moral agent; he acts under the influence of moral motives; he is not the creature of chance; he is not willingly the prey of accident; he has the power, to a certain extent, of controlling his circumstances. He is, further, capable of knowing and of loving God, and of becoming like God.

2. *Its affections.* The soul has lost the image of God. The temple is in ruins, and the Great Inhabitant gone. It is utterly corrupt, polluted, debased, at enmity against God. It is the prey of every bad passion, of every polluting affection; consequently its tendency is

to misery; and unless it be redeemed, it will be miserable for ever.

3. *Its duration.* The soul of man will live for ever, and through the eternity of its existence, it must either be a happy spirit before the throne of God, or a hopeless outcast from His heaven.

II. The price of its redemption. *How vast the price* paid for the redemption of the soul! The precious blood of Christ. Had the whole creation been consumed in one mighty conflagration as the price of redemption, it would have been as nothing compared with this. *How precious the price* of redemption! The Deity became enshrined in man—not changed into a man, but most mysteriously united to a man; the price of redemption was His blood. This price was given (1 John iii. 16; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19).

III. The period of its accomplishment is limited. "It ceaseth for ever." How infinitely precious is time! It is in time only that the redemption of the soul can be ensured. The value of one opportunity of hearing the Gospel is unspeakably great.—*M.A.*, from *Sketches of Sermons*.

MEN OF THE WORLD WHO HAVE THEIR PORTION IN THIS LIFE.

(Verses 16-20.)

I. Men who have their portion in this life must resign it at death. We have here—

1. *Man possessing wealth and honour.* "One is made rich, the glory of his house is increased." By means of wealth

man is able to surround himself with all the luxuries and ornaments produced by nature and by man. "The rich have many friends," who fawn upon and flatter them, and extol their state and their doings. In these days many men

speedily, from small beginnings, grow rich and pompous, and fond of display.

2. *Man rejoicing in wealth and honour.* "In his life he blessed His soul." He is like the rich man described by our Lord, who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much good laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool," &c. Oh, the awful degradation of manhood when a man calls upon his soul to find its chief good in material possessions! In answer to the inquiry, "Who will show us any good?" such men are so far from saying, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us," that they point you to their well-filled barns or their vast estates. Yet it is true that "He aims too low who aims beneath the skies."

3. *Man praised because of his wealth and honour.* "Man will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." "This is the sentiment of all the children of this world, that those do best for themselves that do most for their bodies, by heaping up riches, though, at the same time, nothing is done for the soul, nothing for eternity." Low-natured people abound who court and fawn upon the man of wealth. Mean sycophants are ever ready obsequiously to flatter the "men of the world, who have their portion in this life."

4. *Man compelled to relinquish his wealth and honour.* "When he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out." To the man who elects to have his portion in this life it may be said in the future state, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." "What disarrays like death? It defaces the fascination of the beautiful. It withers the strength of the mighty. It snatches the store of the rich. Kings are stripped of trapping, trophy, treasure: 'Their glory shall not descend after them.'"—*R. W. Hamilton.*

II. Men who have their portion in this life when they depart hence are gathered to their moral ancestors. "He shall go to the generation of his

fathers; they shall never see light." They depart to their own place and their own company. "Under the generation of the fathers," says Hengstenberg, "are here to be understood, not so much the corporeal ancestors of the ungodly, as his predecessors in wickedness." And M. Henry: "His worldly wicked fathers, whose sayings he approved, and whose steps he trod in." They dwell in a dark and melancholy realm. "They shall never see light"—i.e., they shall never have the least glimpse of any joy or comfort. They are banished into the outer darkness.

III. Men who have their portion in this life degrade their being. "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." How unspeakable is the degradation of a spiritual and immortal being, created in God's image and redeemed by Christ's blood, when he lives for this life only, the life of the senses merely! "Many there are," says Barnes, "in exalted stations, who are surrounded by all that wealth can give, yet who no more admit the thought of a future world into their hopes and plans than if they had no other endowment than the camel or the ox, and whose conduct in this respect would not be changed if all the higher endowments which constitute the nature of man were withdrawn, and they were at once reduced to the condition of a brute." M. Henry: "It is better to be a beast than to be a man that makes himself like a beast."

CONCLUSION: 1. *To those who have wealth, but not godliness.* "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" 2. *To those who have godliness, but not wealth.* "It is a temptation," says Dickson, "which shaketh the faith of the godly sometimes, when they see the flourishing prosperity of the wicked and their own daily affliction; but this should not move the godly, nor make them suspect themselves to be in a wrong course and the ungodly in a better way: 'be not thou afraid when one is made rich.'" Your portion is incomparably superior to that of the most wealthy and distinguished of those who

have their portion in this life. "The end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him."

PSALM L.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription. "A Psalm of Asaph." Asaph was "a Levite, son of Berachiah, one of the leaders of David's choir (1 Chron. vi. 39). Psalms l. and lxxiii. to lxxxiii. are attributed to him, but probably all these, except l., lxxiii., and lxxvii., are of later origin. He was in after times celebrated as a Seer as well as a musical composer, and was put on a par with David (2 Chron. xxix. 30; Neh. xii. 46). The office appears to have remained hereditary in his family, unless he was the founder of a school of poets and musical composers, who were called after him 'the sons of Asaph'" (1 Chron. xxv. 1; 2 Chron. xx. 14; Ezra ii. 41).—*Smith's Dict. of the Bible.*

The occasion on which the psalm was composed is unknown. "The object of the psalm," says Barnes, "seems to be to set forth the value and importance of spiritual religion as compared with a mere religion of forms."

A SCENE OF JUDGMENT.

(Verses 1-6.)

In these verses we have a poetical representation of the appearance of the Most High to judge His people as to their conduct in respect to His worship. Though the judgment spoken of in this psalm is a particular one, yet most of the features of this scene are elsewhere represented as characterising the general and final judgment. We have here set before us—

I. The Judge. "The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken. . . . God is Judge Himself." Professor Alexander translates: "The Almighty, God, Jehovah, speaks;" and he points out that *El* is not an adjective agreeing with *Elohim*, but a substantive in apposition with it. Hengstenberg takes the same view, and says: "The heaping up of names must fill the hypocrites with terror, as these bring before their eyes the majesty of Him whose judgment they underlie. In the relation of these designations there is a *gradation*. *Elohim* is more than *El*, to which its singular *Eloah* is equivalent. The plural marks the fulness and the richness of the Divine nature. Jehovah is the highest name according to its derivation—it marks God as the only real Being—and, according to the usage also, which ascribes to Jehovah the

most glorious manifestations of God to and in behalf of His people." He who summons the world to judgment has the right to do so, and the power to enforce His right. *As Judge God is perfect.* Two things are essential to a just judgment.

1. *Competent knowledge of the case to be tried.* In this respect God is perfect as the Judge of man. He is fully acquainted with (1) all spoken words and overt actions; (2) all unuttered thoughts and unwrought purposes; (3) all motives by which we have been actuated; and (4) all the circumstances and influences, both good and evil, by which we have been affected (Ps. cxxxix. 1-16).

2. *Perfect justice in trying the case.* "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid: for how then shall God judge the world?" "A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." His judgment-throne is "a great white throne," *i.e.*, a throne whose judgments are characterised by perfect purity and righteousness. God is the Judge; and He is perfect in all things.

II. The principles upon which judgment will be administered. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God

hath shined." On "Zion, the perfection of beauty," see remarks on Ps. xlviii.

2. "The meaning here is, that the great principles which are to determine the destiny of mankind in the final judgment are those which proceed from Zion; or those which are taught in the religion of Zion; they are those which are inculcated through the Church of God. God has there made known His law; He has stated the principles on which He governs, and on which He will judge the world."—*Barnes*. To the Church God has clearly revealed His will, and made known the principles upon which He will administer the final judgment. (See Eccles. xii. 14; Matt. xxv. 14–46. Acts xvii. 31; Rom. xiv. 10, 12.; *et al.*)

III. *The certainty of the judgment.* "God shall come," &c. Here is no peradventure, but an unmistakable affirmation. Evidence is not wanting of the certainty of future judgment.

1. *Conscience foreshadows it.* "The consciousness of obligation," says R. W. Hamilton, "would lead us to believe that God would bring us into judgment with Him."

2. *Moral government requires it.* "Even-handed justice" is not administered here and now. As Dr. R. W. Dale points out, "the physical penalties of certain forms of sin torture and destroy an inhabitant of Fiji; while they are alleviated and almost wholly averted by the resources which science and wealth place at the disposal of a European; one merchant who is guilty of gross fraud escapes detection, while another who is guilty of precisely the same crime is accidentally discovered, and expiates his offence by long years of disgrace and misery; a lad who has no friends is ruined for life by a single act of folly and sin, while another, who may have been his confederate in wrong-doing, is rescued by the energy and constancy of human affection, recovers his reputation, and after long years of prosperity and honour leaves behind him a name which his children are proud to bear." Many other inequalities of retribution as administered in this life might be pointed out. These demand a "judgment to come."

3. *The word of God affirms it.* (See passages cited above, *et al.*) That last great Assize is certain as the throne of God.

IV. *The terrible majesty of the judge at His appearing.* "A fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him." There is doubtless a reference here to the sublime and terror-inspiring phenomena which accompanied the giving of the law on Sinai (Exod. xix. 16, 18). In the last judgment Christ the Judge will come in "the clouds of heaven" and with "flaming fire," and attended by "mighty angels" (Mark xiii. 26; 2 Thess. i. 7–10; Rev. i. 7). Such descriptions are not designed simply to represent God as clothed with appropriate majesty when appearing to judge the world. The flaming fire, the stormy tempest, the cloudy gloom, the flashings of His glory, are emblematical of the purity and the power and the consuming wrath of the Judge. And they are in keeping with the vast and important transactions and results of the solemn occasion, and the Divine dignity of the Judge. Such an appearance should fill the hearts of saints with holy fear, and sinners with unutterable terror.

V. *The persons to be judged.* "Judge His people. . . . My saints, . . . those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." The people of God are here represented as having entered into a solemn covenant-relation to Him. They have taken God to be their God, and given themselves up to Him and to His service, and the Jews in doing this presented solemn sacrifices to Him. The Christian covenants with God through Christ the great sacrifice, through whom alone we come to God. The Jews were the professed people of God,—His covenanted people (Exod. xix. 3–9). But how often and how sadly did they break the covenant! "It is at first sight strange, that those, whom the Lord will judge as transgressors of His covenant, should be described as His *saints*. But the allusion to the height of their standing and destiny is particularly fitted to cause shame, on account of their present actual

condition." Let not the professed people of God deceive themselves by imagining that if they sin God will not judge them for it; for He certainly will do so. The greater the privileges and profession of any people, the more deserving of punishment will they be found if they dishonour God and walk not in His statutes. But at the last judgment all men, without any exception whatever, must appear and be judged (Rom. xiv. 10, 12; 2 Cor. v. 10; *et al.*)

VI. The witnesses of the judgment. "He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people." The universe is called upon to be present as witness to the solemn transactions of the judgment. Such appeals to the heaven and earth to witness, in Scripture, always indicate the importance and solemnity of the scenes and transactions to which they are called. Thus Moses warned the children of Israel of the danger of provoking God to anger,—"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish," &c. (Deut. iv. 26; see also Micah vi. 2.)

"All His holy angels" will attend the Judge, and witness the proceedings, and testify to their righteousness.

VII. The righteousness of the judgment. "And the heavens shall declare His righteousness; for God is Judge Himself." The perfections of God, especially His holiness and knowledge, guarantee the righteousness of His judgment. (See previous remarks on the perfection of God as a Judge.) The angelic witnesses of the judgment will declare its justice, saying, "True and righteous are His judgments." The redeemed will praise the generosity of His dealings with them. The consciences even of the condemned will acknowledge the righteousness of their doom. The whole universe will subscribe to the justice of His judgments.

CONCLUSION. — 1. *Here is solemn warning to the people of God.* If you depart from Him, He will summon you to meet Him for judgment. 2. *Here is a solemn inquiry for all.* How shall we meet Him in judgment? **Only through Christ Jesus can we do so** (see Rom. viii. 1, 33).

THE FORMAL AND THE SPIRITUAL IN DIVINE SERVICE.

(Verses 7-15.)

The poet represents the judgment of the chosen people as commencing with God's address to them: "Hear, O My people, and I will speak," &c. He testifies against them because of the formality of their services; and calls upon them to offer to Him spiritual sacrifices.

I. The worthlessness of merely formal and material sacrifices in the Divine service. "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds." Such sacrifices are shown to be worthless.

1. *Because of the infinite resources of God.* "For every beast of the forest is mine," &c. (vers. 10-12). He is the absolute proprietor of all things. We are but stewards of our possessions. We hold them under Him and for Him.

"What hast thou that thou didst not receive" from Him? The devout and godly soul recognises this fact, and blesses God, as David did, because He has given to us wherewith we may offer to Him. "Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness," &c. (1 Chron. xxix. 10-16). Only of His own can we give unto Him. This is true of the man of temporal wealth, the man of genius, the man of piety and spiritual power, &c. Utterly worthless, therefore, are all our offerings in His sight, unless they are spiritually and heartily given (Acts xvii. 25).

2. *Because of the spirituality of God.* "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" Did they suppose that the Infinite Spirit needed meat and drink for His support as our bodies do? Being a spirit, the mere

outward sacrifices could afford no satisfaction to Him. "Among the heathen the opinion prevailed that the gods ate and drank what was offered to them in sacrifice; whereas the truth was, that these things were consumed by the priests who attended on heathen altars, and conducted the devotions of heathen temples, and who found that it contributed much to their own support, and did much to secure the liberality of the people, to keep up the impression that what was thus offered was consumed by the gods." The Divine appeal implies that they to whom it was addressed knew better. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Therefore, in His sight the mere material offering was worthless. But let us not suppose that God rejects all outward offerings and sacrifices. He rather requires them. It is quite clear from the eighth verse, "that if the outward sacrifices had not been offered, this also would have been a ground of complaint." But when they are offered as substitutes for the loving reverence of the heart, and the loyal obedience of the life, He rejects them as abominations. When they are the expressions of the soul's prayerful penitence or thankful praise, He accepts them with delight. (See the remarks on Ps. xl. 6.)

II. The worth of spiritual sacrifices in the Divine service. "Offer," or sacrifice, "unto God thanksgiving," &c. (vers. 14, 15). The worth of spiritual offerings is shown here in several respects:

1. *They are enjoined by God.* He commands us to present them unto Him. Notice (1) *The ground of this requirement.* "Hear, O My people, and I will speak: I am God, thy God." "On the one side, my people and Israel, the people of God and of the covenant; on the other side God, the God of heaven and of earth, thy God, who has

bound Israel to Himself by so many benefits, has purchased his obedience so dearly."—*Hengstenberg*. He demands the spiritual worship of His people on the twofold ground of His own Divine perfections and sovereignty, and His covenant relation to them. (2) *The inclusiveness of this requirement.* These spiritual offerings include praise, payment of vows, and prayer. "The giving of thanks," says John Arnd, "comprehends many virtues in itself,—acknowledgment of God as the fountain of all good; fear of God, namely, the childlike fear which receives all benefits from God as the child from the father: humility, confessing that we have nothing of ourselves, but obtain all from God," &c. *Hengstenberg* translates: "Offer to God praise, and THUS pay to the Highest thy vows." He explains: "He only who has rendered the substance of this thank-offering, *thanks*, has truly paid his vow." Lives of penitence, prayer, gratitude, praise, affection, obedience, and trust, constitute the acceptable sacrifices.

2. *They secure His blessing.* "The whole fifteenth verse is of a *promissory* nature. It announces the *reward* which is appointed for the spiritual worship of God. Whoever thanks God in the right manner *for deliverance obtained*, may console himself in the time of distress with the assured hope of a *new deliverance*."—*Hengstenberg*.

3. *They are a means by which we glorify God.* "Thou shalt glorify Me." God is glorified not by our outward professions or material offerings, but by grateful and trustful hearts expressed in holy and earnest lives.

CONCLUSION.—Are we thus honouring Him? Our material offerings and formal services He will not accept unless we give Him our heart and life. Be it ours, through the atonement of Christ Jesus, and in imitation of His example, to devote ourselves unreservedly and for ever to God.

RESOURCE AND COMFORT IN TROUBLE.

(Verse 15.)

Notice—

I. The period described. “The day of trouble.” We are often called to pass through trouble in the present world. We sometimes are troubled with *opposition from the world* (2 Tim. iii. 12), sometimes with *painful family discord* (Prov. xvii. 1), sometimes with *great bodily infirmities* (Isa. xxxviii. 14, 15), sometimes with *inward conflicts* (Rom. vii. 22–24), sometimes with *perplexities in business*, sometimes with *worldly disappointments*, sometimes with the *unfaithfulness of friends* (2 Tim. iv. 10, 16), sometimes with the *weight of declining years*, sometimes with *slandorous reports* (Ps. xli. 5–8), sometimes with *pecuniary losses*, sometimes with *afflictive bereavements* (Ps. lxxxviii. 18), and sometimes with *tormenting fears* (2 Cor. vii. 5).

II. The direction given. “Call upon Me.” We should do this—in the language of *deprecation* (Ps. cxliii. 2); in the language of *petition* (Ps. lxix. 14); in the language of *confession* (Ps. li. 2, 1 John i. 9); in the language of *humility* (Gen. xviii. 27, xxxii. 10); and in the language of *submission* (Matt. xxvi. 42).

III. The consolation introduced. “I will deliver thee.” This He will do at the *fittest time*, by the *fittest instruments*, through the *fittest mediums*, and in the *fittest manner*.

IV. The consequence anticipated. “Thou shalt glorify Me.” In the *memory*, by lively recollections of My kindness; in the *conscience*, by fearing to prove ungrateful; in the *affections*, by loving Me supremely; in the *life*, by devotedness to My service.—*W. Sleigh.*

GOD’S CHALLENGE TO RELIGIOUS HYPOCRITES.

(Verses 16–23.)

We have here—

I. Religious hypocrites proclaiming God’s law. “What hast thou to do to declare My statutes, or that thou shouldest take My covenant in thy mouth?” It is a great evil when private professors of religion are untrue to their profession. In them hypocrisy is an evil and pernicious thing. But for hypocrites to declare and teach God’s law to others, and set it at nought themselves, is an outrageous evil. He who preaches the law to others should endeavour to keep the law himself. A man who is not himself sincerely religious has *no Divine authority* to preach the Word of God to others. Neither has he the *ability* to do so aright. To represent the power and beauty of truth and grace faithfully, we must know their beauty and power for ourselves. “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” (See Rom. ii. 17–24.)

II. Religious hypocrites despising God’s Word. “Thou hatest instruction,

and castest My words behind thee.” A teacher of others, yet unwilling to learn himself. A preacher of the Word of God to others, yet contemptuously disregarding that Word himself. It is to be feared that there are still teachers of religion who themselves refuse to be taught of God; and who, by neglecting its study or disobeying its precepts, despise the Word of God. Such persons occupy and profane the sacred position of religious teachers for the gratification of their ambition, or for the emoluments of the office, &c. But whatever may be their motive, their sin is most heinous and mischievous.

III. Religious hypocrites breaking God’s laws. “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him,” &c. (vers. 18–20). These teachers of the law are here charged by God with breaking its seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments. He accuses them of adultery, theft, and false witness. They approved the practices of thieves and

shared in their plunder. Adultery was "very common among the Jews, for even the Talmud accuses some of the most celebrated Rabbis of this vice."—*M. Stuart*. The charge of evil speaking is very strong. It was not an occasional thing with them; they were addicted to it. Mouth and tongue were devoted to wickedness and deceit. "The expression in ver. 20, 'thou sittest,' is a delineation to the life of babbling companies." In the enjoyment of social intercourse they employed themselves in backbiting and slandering. Even the nearest relations were not exempt from their venomous tongues. Their "brother," their "own mother's son," they would assail. "It is to be remembered that where polygamy prevailed there would be many children in the same family who had the same father, but not the same mother. The nearest relationship, therefore, was where there was the same mother as well as the same father. To speak of a brother, in the strictest sense, and as implying the nearest relationship, it would be natural to speak of one as having the same mother."—*Barnes*. Now these sins—slander, even of the nearest relations, adultery, and complicity with thieves—are charged against not merely professors of religion, but teachers of the law. The effect of such sins in persons holding such a position and making such a profession is most baneful. These effects are—

1. *Ruin to the hypocrites themselves.* (See 2 Pet. ii.)

2. *Paralysis and corruption to the Church.*

3. *Stumbling to the world.* (Rom. ii. 24; 2 Pet. ii. 2.)

IV. Religious hypocrites deceiving themselves as to the Divine character and conduct. "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." God had borne long with them in their evil ways. His forbearance and long-suffering were exercised with a view to their repentance. But they misinterpreted His non-interference as an indication that He regarded sin even as they did. Sinners take God's silence for

consent, and His patience with them as palliation of their sins, and are thus encouraged in evil. But great is their mistake in this. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Yet it surely will be executed.

V. Religious hypocrites interrogated by God. "What hast thou to do to declare My statutes?" &c. (ver. 16). Thus God challenges their right and title to proclaim His statutes. What right had they to speak of His covenant when they were constantly and flagrantly violating it? This challenge implies—

1. *The inconsistency of their conduct.*

2. *The enormity of their conduct.* They were profaning the most sacred realities; endangering the most precious interests of human souls; dishonouring God.

3. *The rejection by God of their professional duties.* He rejects with utter abhorrence the professional services in His cause of those whose hearts and lives are profane and impure.

VI. Religious hypocrites convicted of their sins. "I will reprove thee, and set them in order before Mine eyes." The word translated "reprove" means to demonstrate against, reprove, rebuke, chastise. We take it to mean here that God would thoroughly convince them of the charges which He brings against them, by setting their sins in order before their eyes. He would summon their sins from the graves of the past to rise and confront them, and so convince them. "He declares," says Calvin, "that they will soon be drawn into open light, that they shall be compelled to see with their eyes the shameful deeds which they had imagined they could conceal from the eyes of God. For so I understand *the setting in order*, that God will lay before them in exact order a full catalogue of their misdeeds, which they must read and own, whether they will or not." Unless our sins are blotted out by the blood of Christ, we must confront them all again to our utter confusion.

VII. Religious hypocrites warned by God. "Now consider this, ye that for-

get God, lest I tear you in pieces," &c. "It is the doom of hypocrites to be cut asunder (Matt. xxiv. 51). Note,—1. Forgetfulness of God is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked. Those that know God, and yet do not obey Him, do certainly forget Him. 2. Those that forget God forget themselves, and it will never be right with them till they consider, and so recover themselves. Consideration is the first step towards conversion. 3. Those that will not consider the warnings of God's Word will certainly be torn in pieces by the execution of His wrath. 4. When God comes to tear sinners in pieces, there is no delivering them out of His hand. They cannot deliver themselves, nor can any friend they have in the world deliver them."—*M. Henry.*

VIII. All men instructed by God. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me," &c. (ver. 23). The first clause of this verse is a compend of vers. 14 and 15. On the second, Matthew Henry remarks: "1. It is not enough for us to offer praise, but we must withal order our conversation aright. Thanksgiving

is good, but thanksgiving is better. 2. Those that would have their conversation right must take care and pains to order it, to dispose it according to rule, to understand their way and to direct it. 3. Those that take care of their conversation make sure their salvation. The right ordering of the conversation is the only way, and it is a sure way, to obtain the great salvation."

CONCLUSION.—Let professors of religion, and especially ministers thereof, examine themselves. To each of us who are ministers or teachers our Lord by His apostle says,—“Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Brethren, are we such an example? If there be any hypocrisy, any insincerity in us, let us take warning, and repent, and be saved while yet we may.

And let the sincere Christian, who sacrifices unto God thanksgiving, and orders his conversation aright, be encouraged, for his salvation is of the Lord, and faileth not.

AN AWFUL FALLACY.

Ver. 21. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself."

There are certain features in which we are like God. "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." There are certain features of that likeness which sin has not destroyed. Our reason remains. Our moral sense, though injured, is not destroyed, &c. If we were not in some respects like God, we could receive no revelation of Him. But it is a sinful fallacy to suppose that God is altogether like us. Let us exhibit the fallaciousness and evil of such a supposition.

I. Men are able to hide their sins from each other, and the wicked act as though they could hide them from God. Wicked men do impose upon their fellow-men by means of religious professions and practices. The Jews addressed in this psalm imagined that their ritualistic observances would hide from God the enormity of their moral

conduct. They thought that they could impose upon God by their religious forms. This is what men are doing now. If men realised the impossibility of hiding anything from God, sin would become an exceptional thing. And yet, how preposterous it is to think to hide anything from the All-Seeing! He has "set our secret sins in the light of His countenance."

II. Men are apt to lose all concern for the insignificant when occupied with the important, and the wicked act as though this were the case with God. The statesman dealing with national problems and influencing the destinies of mighty empires may overlook the beggar-child that stands at his gate. The wicked argue, "God is great and occupied with concerns of unlimited extent and unspeakable importance; He upholds the entire universe; do you think He leaves these vast concerns to notice the sins of one man? I can

understand His punishing the sins of a host of angels, or of a multitude of men, or of a nation; but the failings of one imperfect man He does not concern Himself about." How foolish! Great and small are only the relative terms of imperfect beings. To God nothing is unimportant, &c.

III. Men become unmindful of an offence in course of time, and the wicked think that in this God is altogether as they are. We are indifferent now to an offence which we bitterly resented some years ago when it was offered to us. Time has wonderfully toned down our feeling. But God never forgets or becomes indifferent to any sin. He knows the dark history of every sin, sees all its awful relations and bearings, and so He never becomes indifferent as we do. Moreover, He knows that sin must either be pardoned or punished, and, therefore, His solicitude for the sinner's good keeps the sin ever before Him. We may grow indifferent to a wrong, but God never can.

IV. Men regard sin with great leniency, and the wicked imagine that God does so. "Fools make a mock at sin." Society says of the profligate that he is "somewhat gay," or "a trifle fast." Philosophers speak of sin as "misdirection," or as a result of deficient education, or unfavourable circumstances and surroundings. These tolerant and false views of sin men are prone to transfer to God. But with Him sin is the "abominable thing which He hates." He has proclaimed His hatred of it in the punishment of the angels who sinned, in the destruction of the ungodly world by the flood, in the overthrow of the cities of the plain, &c. The sufferings and death of Jesus His Son to put away sin are God's great protest against evil. He is completely, unchangeably, eternally opposed to it.

V. Men treat sin and sinners in a very changeable manner, and the wicked think that God will do so.

Man burns with anger against an offender, and threatens stern punishment; but the anger cools and the punishment is never inflicted. Or man threatens a punishment which he cannot inflict. Men are prone to think that God is as they are in this respect. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily," &c. His threatenings, they think, are designed to deter men from evil; but if it is committed, He will not arise to punish for it. But this is a fatal mistake. He will fulfil His threatenings against the impenitent. Judgment is delayed, because in His mercy God waits for the wicked to turn penitently to Him. But if His forbearance do not result in their penitence, His judgment will be the more terrible. He will set their sins before them in all their multiplicity and enormity, and the sight will extinguish their hope, and call upon Despair henceforth to be their attendant angel.

Sin must be either cast behind God's back, or it will cast the sinner into hell. There is forgiveness with God. He delighteth in mercy. He abundantly pardons. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Seek Him while He may be found.

Let us not imagine that God is altogether like unto us in His estimate of evil and evil-doers; but let us seek to view sin as He does, with implacable hatred, and to resist it with relentless vigour.

Others, imagining God to be like themselves, conclude that He regards sin with feelings of stormy passion and sinful revenge. They do greatly err. And others that He is partial in His redemptive purposes and sectarian in His sympathies. They also err. His love is far greater than the best of our conceptions of it.

Let us not think that God is altogether like unto us, but endeavour, through Jesus Christ, to become altogether like unto Him.

P S A L M L I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE superscription informs us both as to the author of the psalm, and the occasion of its composition. "To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The contents of the psalm accord with the superscription on both points. For the history of the painful circumstances, see 2 Sam. xi., and xii. 1-14.

That the psalm is addressed "To the Chief Musician," shows that it was not merely a private confession of the poet's guilt to God, but a public expression of his penitence. Hengstenberg, quoting the Marburg Bible, says: "'David wrote this psalm not for himself alone to be used as a prayer, but for those also who had charge of the temple music, that he might again edify, by his repentance, the people of God, whom he had offended by his sin; and till then he had no rest in his bosom, as he confesses in Ps. xxxii. 2.' This publicity in the confession of the sin was quite as great a work of God's grace in David, as the depth of his knowledge in regard to it. Nature must have struggled hard against it. But the design of the publicity he gives us in ver. 13. He would, through his repentance, lead others to the same."

THE PENITENT'S PSALM.

"This psalm," says Robertson, "written three thousand years ago, might have been written yesterday: it describes the vicissitudes of spiritual life in an Englishman as truly as of a Jew. 'Not of an age, but for all time.' We have here—

I. The Penitent's Confession. Confession is not a single act. It comprehends, at least, three things: (α.) *A right estimate of sin.* The true penitent regards sin not as mere misdirection, or the result of imperfect development, but as the guilty violation of a holy law. (β.) *A right feeling in relation to sin.* The sincere penitent loathes sin, and "grieves for having grieved his God." (γ.) *Right conduct in relation to sin.* He endeavours to forsake sin, and to follow after holiness. The Psalmist in his confession—

1. *Recognises the evil of sin.* He regards it (1). As an *unrighteous* thing. "Mine iniquity." Sin is a reversal of true moral relations and order. (2.) As a *breach of moral law.* "My transgressions." By his sins he had violated the holy laws of the supreme and gracious Sovereign. (3.) As a *defiling* thing. He felt himself utterly polluted by his sins, and asks again and again for cleansing. Thus David recognises the essential evil of sin, and its injurious influence upon human life and character. He does not attempt to pal-

liate its wickedness; but exhibits unmistakably its blackness, and deformity, and blasting power.

2. *Recognises the sin as his own.* "My transgressions . . . mine iniquity . . . my sin." We are prone to try to shift the responsibility of our sins from ourselves to others. We blame the circumstances in which we were placed, or the temptations by which we were assailed, or the tendencies which we have inherited, or the training which we have received. But of this we find nothing in this penitential psalm. David feels that the sin and guilt of his crimes were his, and his only. "I acknowledge my transgression," &c. "I have sinned," &c. His sins appeared so aggravated to him, that he could only express his feeling in this respect by saying that he was born in sin. As Robertson says, "He lays on himself the blame of a tainted nature, instead of that of a single fault: not a murder only, but of a murderous nature. 'Conceived in sin.' From his first moments up till then, he saw sin—sin—sin: nothing but sin." Sin and guilt cannot be transferred from one to another. If I do evil, the guilt is my own. "Every man shall bear his own burden." The Divinely-awakened conscience ever feels this—confesses this—says, "I acknowledge my transgressions."

3. *Regards sin as hostile to God.*

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," &c. The Most High has no complicity with evil. Sin is ever to Him the "abominable thing which He hates." He brings good out of evil, overrules evil for the accomplishment of His glorious purposes. Yet He is not the author of evil, but its sworn and uncompromising antagonist. His laws in both the material and spiritual realms are against it; His administration is against it; His great redemption is against it; His essential nature is utterly opposed to it. True penitence feels this, and says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." David had sinned grievously against human society; but it was the fact that his offences were wrongs against his God that chiefly impressed and distressed him. All sins against man are sins against God also. You cannot harm your fellow-man without wronging God. "Every blow struck against humanity is a blow struck against God." A fact this pregnant with solemn suggestions. Thus the confession of this royal penitent expresses the judgments and emotions of the penitent heart to day.

II. The penitent's prayer. The Psalmist prays for,—

1. *Forgiveness of his sins.* "Have mercy upon me, O God," &c. (ver. 1). "Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Confession and forgiveness are inseparably connected (Ps. xxxii. 5; Luke xvii. 3, 4; 1 John i. 9). Confession is not the efficient cause of forgiveness, but it is its indispensable condition. It is "a necessary basis of forgiveness." The figures here used to denote forgiveness give clearness and prominence to the idea of its *completeness*. "Blot out my transgressions, . . . blot out all mine iniquities:" as the account of a debt is wiped away or cancelled by the creditor, or as a cloud is dispelled by the beams of the sun. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." "Hide Thy face from my sins;" do not regard them; "cast all my sins behind Thy back;" remember them against me no more for ever.

2. *Cleansing and renewal of his spirit.*

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "Mark the *thoroughness* of this desire. Not only must sin be blotted out, but the *sinner* himself must be washed and cleansed. There must not be merely a change of *state*, but a change of *nature*. Not only must the debt be forgiven, but all *disposition* to contract further debt must be eradicated. All true and lasting change must be made in the nature. The *heart* is the seat of all wrong. Hence no prayer will avail that does not come from the heart, and express the deepest and holiest aspirations of the soul. Such was David's prayer."—*Parker*.

3. *Restoration of the joy of salvation.* "Make me to hear joy and gladness. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." Here are three ideas (1.) The experience of the salvation of God is joyous. The joy of assured forgiveness, of the Divine favour, of exalted hopes, &c. (2.) By indulgence in sin man forfeits this joy. David did so. (3.) By sincere penitence and prayer those who have lost this joy may regain it.

4. *Preservation from sin and ruin.* "Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy holy Spirit from me. Uphold me with Thy free Spirit." David's great fear was that God might abandon him, might leave him to himself. To the penitent soul exile from God would be the deepest misery. And feeling his weakness and proneness to fall into sin, the Psalmist entreats God to uphold and keep him. Such are the main points in this penitent's prayer. We shall do well to heed one feature of it to which Robertson gives clear and forcible expression. This prayer "is not the trembling of a craven spirit in anticipation of torture, but the agonies of a noble one in the horror of *being* evil. . . . Do you fancy that men like David, shuddering in sight of evil, dreaded a material hell? I venture to say, into true penitence the idea of punishment never enters. If it did, it

would be almost a relief : but, oh ! those moments in which a selfish act has appeared more hideous than any pain which the fancy of a Dante could devise ! when the idea of the strife of self-will in battle with the loving will of God prolonged for ever, has painted itself to the imagination as the real Infinite Hell ! when self-concentration and the extinction of love in the soul has been felt as the real damnation of the Devil-nature !”

III. The penitent's resolution. David resolves that, when the joy of salvation is restored to him—

1. *He will seek the conversion of sinners.* “Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways.” The forgiven penitent will seek to lead others to the source whence he has derived his blessing, that they also may partake of it. The ways of God which David would teach transgressors are (1) The way which He would have sinners pursue,—the way of penitence. And (2) The way which He pursues towards sinners,—the way of rich and free forgiving mercy. Now the converted man is *fitted* to teach transgressors these ways. He knows them ; for he has trodden the one and experienced the other. He *alone* is fitted to teach these ways. It is essential that he who would teach others the way of salvation knows that way experimentally himself. He is also *impelled* to teach transgressors these ways. Gratitude urges him to do so, forbids him to be silent. He must tell others of the blessings he has received, and urge them to seek them for themselves. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” “Necessity is laid upon me ; yea, woe is unto me,” &c.

2. *He will worship God.* “My tongue shall sing aloud of Thy right-

eousness. . . . My mouth shall show forth Thy praise. For Thou desirest not sacrifice,” &c. (See “*The Hom. Com.*” on Ps. xl. 6–8, and l. 7–15.) (1.) The one great sacrifice for sin has been offered and accepted, and is gloriously perfect (Heb. x. 1–18). (2.) Our sacrifice of praise, our thank-offerings of gifts to the cause of God, are worthless in His sight unless they proceed from feelings of sincere devotion and gratitude. (3.) When the heart is moved by penitence, and gratitude, and reverence, it will offer itself in praise to God, and in service in His cause. When the heart is truly sacrificed to God, all other possessions will be freely offered to Him. On this point, the testimony of ver. 19 is conclusive. David would not content himself with offering the sacrifices prescribed by the ceremonial law, but would offer *himself* to God in humblest penitence and heartiest praise. This self-sacrifice is the very soul of all acceptable sacrifices. David anticipates, as a result of his restoration, that—

3. *The whole Church would praise God* (vers. 18, 19). He feared lest, by reason of his sins, the Divine judgments should fall upon the city and kingdom, or the Divine favour be withdrawn from them. No man stands alone. The sin of one man may lead to the injury or even to the ruin of many others. David, therefore, implores the manifestation of the Divine favour in granting them security and prosperity. And he promises that then acceptable sacrifices—the costliest sacrifices offered by sincere worshippers—shall be presented unto Him.

NOTE—The exposition of this psalm might be suitably divided into three discourses,—one, on *The Confession* ; another, on *The Petitions* ; and the third, on *The Resolutions of the Penitent*.

AN INDISPENSABLE PRAYER FOR EVERY ONE.

(Verse 2. “*Cleanse me from my sin.*”)

Consider—

I. The need you have to offer this prayer.

1. *You cannot cleanse yourselves from*

sin. The guilt of your sin you cannot blot out. The pollution of your sin you are equally unable to take away.

2. *You cannot live happily without you*

are cleansed from sin. Surely, as the shadow follows the substance, sorrow follows sin, and joy holiness.

3. *You cannot die peacefully unless you are cleansed from sin.* "The sting of death is sin."

4. *You cannot be acquitted at the Divine tribunal except you are cleansed from sin.* "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ," &c.

5. *You cannot be admitted into heaven without you are cleansed from your sin.* "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth," &c.

6. *You cannot escape hell unless you are cleansed from your sin.* There is no world between heaven and hell. "The wicked shall be turned into hell," &c.

II. The requisites you must possess to present this prayer successfully.

1. *You must be alive to your sin.* Men must be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, before they will be anxious to be saved. Where guilt is not felt, pardon will not be desired.

2. *You must see that your sin has been committed against God.* Every evil deed perpetrated is done against the Almighty. This David felt.

3. *You must take the blame of your sin to yourselves.* The common practice

is to attribute it to the tempter. Adam laid it on his wife, and Eve cast it on the serpent. Like them we seek to exculpate ourselves. But there must be the impression that we are utterly inexcusable, &c.

4. *You must be desirous to part with your sin.* Unwilling as men are to forsake their vicious course, they would fain be quit of its dire consequences. But he who will have his sin must have its evils. The cause must be removed before its effects can.

5. *You must be sorry for your sin.* There is a fitness between contrition and pardon; but there is none between impenitence and remission. The penitent are in a proper state to be forgiven; the impenitent are not.

6. *You must have faith in the cleansing efficacy of Christ's blood.* Requisite as are the foregoing to your being in a proper condition to ask or to have the blessings spoken of, they cannot, if relied on, secure it, as there is not the slightest merit in them. The only merit on the ground of which we can be redeemed from all iniquity is in Christ, and in Him alone. For Him to be your redemption you must have faith in His blood.

In conclusion, *have you prevailingly urged this petition?*—JOHN SMITH. Abridged from "*The Congregational Pulpit*."

THE CHIEF EVIL OF SIN.

Ver. 4. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."

Since the crimes of the Psalmist were of that class which are most directly against society, and since he appears at the time to have regarded them in that very relation, what is the import of the phrase, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned"? The following is the only possible solution. Notwithstanding the deep sense of his crime, as viewed in its social relation, he had such an overwhelming sense of its enormity as committed against God, that it threw into comparative obscurity the injury to man. This language, therefore, dictated by

the Divine Spirit, must afford ample authority for the following doctrine:—

The evil of sin consists chiefly in its being committed against God.

This doctrine does not, in the least degree, invalidate the obligations of mortals to each other; or diminish the guilt of crimes viewed merely in their social relation. The man who considers the chief evil of sin to consist in a violation of Divine obligations, has as strong a view of social obligations, as he who overlooks all duty to God, and makes human injury the only criterion of guilt. That sin is an evil, so far as it infringes on the rights and happiness of fellow-mortals, is admitted by all.

But the Word of God compels us to believe, that the same transgressions are an immensely greater evil considered as offences against God. Should any one ask, "Why is it a thousand-fold worse for me to murder my neighbour than if God had not forbidden it?" I answer,—

1. *Because God is your Maker.* We who are parents claim the right to command our children; and, when they disobey, we place the main point of their offending in simple disobedience. And what is the aggravation of violating a parent's authority, compared with that of rebellion against the Eternal Father of our spirits?

2. *God sustains us.* From the dawn of our existence to this hour, He has been mindful of us, with more than a parent's tender care. Amid countless dangers, He has cast His shield about us.

3. *He has encompassed us with countless blessings.* For us the rivers flow, the oceans roll, the clouds distil, and the seasons keep their appointed times. His sun is made to light us by day—His moon and stars by night. To shield us from cold, He has provided raiment—from heat, a shade—from storms, a shelter.

4. *He has prepared a heaven for our eternal home.* It is the abode of His own infinite blessedness, the palace of His glory, and the home of holy angels.

5. *When we had forfeited this bright heaven, and plunged ourselves in guilt and woe, God gave His own dear Son to redeem us.* To achieve this work, it was needful that the Saviour take upon Himself the form of a servant, be made under the law, pass a life of suffering and scorn, and, finally, be crucified by wicked hands. Yet to all this He submitted, not by constraint, but willingly—nay, joyfully.

6. *God has given us a revelation comprising the knowledge and motives requisite for the attainment of this great salvation.* And how is this sacred volume filled with entreaties to sinful man to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the hope set before him!

7. *He bears long with us, as a race of guilty beings, and as individuals.* Each

spared sinner is a perfect demonstration of the infinite goodness of God. And the aged impenitent is as great a monument of the Divine forbearance as he is of guilt. Reflect, then, that against this same God you have committed every sin that has polluted your life. Under this conviction, if your conscience be not dead, you cannot but exclaim with the Psalmist, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," &c.

From the foregoing we may draw the following inferences:—

1. *The punishment denounced against the wicked is manifestly just.*

2. *There is not so great a difference as men often imagine between different kinds of sin.* I would not deny that "some sins in themselves are more heinous in the sight of God than others." Nor would I at all intimate an equality of guilt among transgressors possessing different degrees of light, or actuated by different degrees of malignity. . . . But we have seen that the chief evil of sin consists in its violation of Divine obligation. Let no one, then, speak of small sins—little offences—and assign as his reason that he injures no one but himself,—that he does not infringe on the rights of his fellow-men. It is idle and delusive and impious to indulge in thus comparing and extenuating our crimes of rebellion against the infinite Sovereign. Each sin, thus viewed, is of magnitude sufficient to sink a world.

3. *The most upright man is a great sinner.* Suppose him perfectly honest—exculpate him from falsehood—and say that he never injured the character or feelings of any mortal. A human tribunal would then acquit him. But has he kept all God's commandments? &c.

4. *We are taught by this doctrine our need of Christ's atonement.* And the glorious work is accomplished, and a ready pardon offered, &c.

5. *We see the nature of true conviction.* It consists in seeing and feeling the evil of sin as committed against God. Fear of punishment is often mistaken for conviction; but it is really not even a necessary part of it. Real conviction does not cease at conversion,

but increases with our growth in grace and knowledge of God. David, Isaiah, and Paul appeared to feel it with increasing emotion, and to loathe and

abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes. — *Ralph Emerson, A.M.* Abridged from "*The Preacher's Treasury*."

DAVID'S PRAYER.

(Verse 7.)

A sermon useful when it goes with a man to his closet, as well as affects him for the present. Nathan's to David. Hyssop—alluding to the cleansing the leper (Lev. xiv. 1-7). Or to the waters of separation (Num. xix.) Observe:—

I. When God leads us to reflect on our sins, we feel ourselves awfully polluted. David in the text. (Job xlii. 1-6; Ps. xxxviii. 4; Is. vi. 1-5, lxiv. 6; Ezek. xx. 43; Luke xv. 17-19, xviii. 13; Acts ii. 36, 37; Titus iii. 3.) O my soul! O my hearers! reflect.

II. The blood of Jesus Christ is even more than a remedy for the foulest iniquities. "*Whiter than snow*" (Rom. v. 20, 21). How?

1. *As it makes the penitent more acceptable to God, and more secure in His favour than Adam in Paradise.* (Luke xv. 7, 22, 32; Rom. viii. 1, &c.; Eph. i. 6, v. 27; Col. iii. 3, 4.)

2. *As it excites them to obey God in resisting temptation more than Adam.* (Gen. iii. 11-13, compared with Eph. vi. 11-17, Rev. xii. 10, 11.)

3. *As God will be more glorified in recovering a fallen sinner, than in making man upright.* As Redeemer than

as Creator. As the God of grace in the Gospel than as Law-Giver. (Is. xlv. 22, 23; Luke ii. 10-14; 2 Cor. iii. 7-11; 1 Pet. i. 11, 12.)

4. *As the happiness of the penitent will be ultimately greater than that of Adam in Paradise.* (Rev. vii. 9, &c.)

III. This remedy becomes effectual by an application to our own case. See text. As food—physic—clothing, &c. Noah's ark. The brazen serpent. The cities of refuge.

IV. The application of this remedy to ourselves is to be sought in prayer. See text. (Ps. cvi. 4, 5, cxxx. 1-6; Luke xviii. 13.)

V. Though God has pardoned the penitent he can scarcely believe it, and will be applying for pardon again and again. Thus David in this psalm, though Nathan had told him of God's forgiveness (2 Sam. xii. 13).

USES.—1. *Alarm to sinners impenitent and unpardoned in their sins.* 2. *Caution to the self-righteous.* 3. *Bless God for the cleansing blood of Jesus, and use it to God's glory,—to your own salvation.*—F—r.

DAVID'S PRAYER AND VOW.

(Verses 10-13.)

There is an essential difference between the prayers offered up under the influence of habit merely, and those which are induced by a deep sense of guilt, dependence, and want. When David uttered the words before us, he felt that he needed the grace and mercy of his Maker,—consequently his requests were simple, important, and earnest. Perhaps there is no one here that has fallen into sin such as that which the Psalmist had committed—

still, there is no one but may offer up his prayer with the greatest propriety.

I. Let us glance at the petitions. "*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*" The Psalmist felt that his heart was defiled—that it was not in his power to cleanse it—he therefore prayed that God would perform the work. "*Renew a right spirit within me.*" These words refer to the temper of the mind. The Psalmist knew that *his was wrong*; and, consequently prayed that God would re-

new a *right spirit* within him. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "*Cast me not away from Thy presence.*" In the presence of God is "fulness of joy:" therefore, to be cast away from His presence is to be deprived of happiness. "*Take not Thy holy spirit from me.*" The Spirit of God "helpeth our infirmities:" therefore, to be deprived of the Spirit is to be deprived of help. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter: therefore, to be deprived of the Spirit is to be deprived of comfort. "*Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.*" The knowledge of salvation produces joy,—this joy the Psalmist had experienced,—it was not his portion when he uttered these words,—he therefore desired its restoration. "*Uphold me with Thy free spirit.*"

Having experienced the sad consequences of falling into sin, the Psalmist here prays that when restored he might be upheld, and prevented from falling again.

II. Notice the predicated results of a gracious answer; or the connection between piety and usefulness. "Then will I teach transgressors Thy way; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." He that enjoys the blessings of salvation, can speak on religious subjects with more feeling, and, consequently, with more effect than others. This may remind Christians, and especially Christian ministers, that *eminent piety* is exceedingly desirable, not only on their own account, but also that they may be qualified for extensive usefulness.—"*The Young Minister's Companion.*"

THE JOYS OF SALVATION.

(Verse 12.)

"The joy of Thy salvation."

It is God's salvation. It is no dreamy following of the upward instincts and aspirations of the nature; no trying to be just, pure, and good, and then, if we fail, and become selfish, sensual, and devilish, forgetting the failure and trying again, always trying, always hoping, with a vague belief that though sin always gets the better of us, there is some good thing in us which, after all, cannot be lost. Neither is it a vague reliance on God's goodness and mercy, a feeling that He is a Father, and cannot, therefore, doom His children to despair and death. These dreams and hopes are the salvations which men provide for themselves; but they are not, nor are they like, God's salvation.

God's salvation rests upon the knowledge of God Himself, as He has revealed Himself—His name—His word—His promises—His work; whereby, not by our own dreams or hopes, but by His declaration, "We have strong consolation," &c. It is one thing to feel that He is a Father, and must be full of love to His children; it is another thing to hear Him say, "I am a Father; I love as no human father can love, &c.

(John iii. 16, 17). It is one thing to trust vaguely to God's goodness for pardon; it is another thing to hear Him say, "Come now, and let us reason together," &c.; and to follow His guiding finger till we behold "the Lamb of God," &c. It is one thing to have our hopes and instincts looking on towards immortality, &c.; it is another thing to see "life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel," to stand by the unsealed tomb of Lazarus and hear such awful words as these, "I am the resurrection, and the life:" &c. (John xi. 25-44; xiv. 1-5; xx. 17).

The man who has received these truths from God, these gifts of God, and knows why and "whom he has believed," is the man in whom the joys of God's salvation abound. He has *God's salvation*; his ground is the everlasting rock, the Word of God. What are its joys?

I. The joy of a sufficient and final answer to the self-upbraidings of a guilty soul. The sense of guilt, the dread of doom, must be disposed of, before there can be any freedom, any upright, manly activity, any pure and lasting joy. The man who wakes up to comprehend the breadth and the depth

of God's law, stands self-condemned. All refuges of lies have vanished, the naked realities appear, and his sin clouds over utterly the heaven of God's love. The sense of guilt torments him. "O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This question of the purging of guilt is the fundamental question of all the religions of heathendom—of all simple, untutored souls (Micah vi. 6-8). To this questioning there is but one joyful answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," &c. (Rom. vii. 25; viii. 1-4, 33-39). The burden falls off; the darkness is chased by dawn.

II. The joy of a portion which satisfies the heart's largest conceptions and desires. "My soul panteth for God, for the living God." There is that in man which the knowledge of the living God only can satisfy, which, having God, has all things in Him. We know what it is to love the creature—to feel that the love and communion of some fœd, fair idol would make the bliss of earth, the bliss of eternity. He has the joys of God's salvation who has done with idols—who loves only that which has eternal beauty and fairness in the creature, and finds that he has the very substance of all that may be loved in the Lord. The commerce between the believing soul and Christ is the ravishing sweetness of the present—the hope of unclouded vision, of unbounded communion, is the glorious treasure of the future.

III. The joy of an answer to all the difficulties and perplexities which beset the spirit and the intellect in their progress. I do not say that the believer, in full communion with Christ and with the joys of His salvation, is freed from the mental and the moral cares which beset the path of a soul's progress. That joy—the joy of knowing that doubt, darkness, and the anguish of mental and moral conflict, are done with for ever—we shall realise when we can take up the song, "For I am now ready to be offered," &c. (2 Tim. iv. 6-8). We must win our creed by mental conflict, we must win our crown by moral conflict; but the joy of God's salvation

is tasted by those who feel that the great central truths, at any rate, are sure. "I know whom I have believed." I have found the centre; to explore the circumference may be matter of danger, difficulty, suffering, but hope lights the way, the sorrow can never darken into despair. One thing is clear to me, let what will be dark, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." . . . There is hope of *his* knowing all things that is good to know, who has already the mind of Christ.

IV. The joy of having the key to all the mysterious ways of Providence in the world. God writes the record of His Providential government in ciphers. We know the cipher; it is a blank to others. To those who know God it is plain and clear. To the soul well grounded in the conviction, "He doeth all things well," there is no mystery. This or that thing may be difficult to understand; but to him who believes, the mystery, at any rate, is dissipated—the full understanding will come in time. How deadly is the difficulty to those who have not found the key in the love of God in Christ, let these passages show: Job xxiii. 1-9, xi. 5-10; Is. xxxviii. 9-19. But "we know that all things work together for good," &c. And we believe that God forsaketh not the world in all its agonies and perils, for which the Lord Jesus died. We can even take these sorrows, and make them into joys (Rom. v. 3; 1 Pet. i. 7).

V. The joy of victory over death. It is an awful thing to look upon the face of the dead. Where is the spirit which a moment since? &c. The most dread moment of our experience is before us—every one of us. We may have mastered many agonies; we have yet to wrestle with the agony of death. Then the dearest must leave you; alone you must then face your destiny. As the dear forms of earth grow dim, a grander, more beautiful, more glorious form will come shining through the gloom (Ps. xxiii. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 55-58). "Absent from the body, present with the Lord."

VI. The joy of living union with God, with Christ, with all living and blessed beings, eternally. What is

that world? What its speech, its habit, the forms of its life? We know not. The veil hangs over all these (1 John iii. 2, 3). "We know;" for He is there—the God-man glorified; and the God-man glorified, through trial, suffering, and death, is the key to the life of eternity. This "we know," for we see Jesus. We can wait to know more till we see Him unveiled in heaven (1 Cor. ii. 9).

These are the joys of His salvation,

and now they are freely offered to you by the Gospel—"Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Take in your hand now the riches that add no sorrow, the joy that leaves no aftertaste of pain; and let "the joy of the Lord be your strength"—strength for duty, strength for making known to others the joys of salvation God has given you as your portion.—*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.* Abridged from "*Aids to the Development of the Divine Life.*"

DAVID'S PRAYER.

(Verse 14.)

Notice—

I. To whom David goes when conviction of sin is brought home to his conscience by the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Nathan.

1. Man shuns and avoids his accuser. It was *God* who had accused David of his sin. Yet to *God* he goes with confession of guilt and prayer for forgiveness. When God convicts of sin, turn not away from Him, but, &c.

2. Man shuns and avoids his judge. It was *God* who had condemned David to suffer in his own family for unholy inroad made on sacred family ties of another. Yet to *God* he goes. When God lays His hand upon us, let us not turn away from Him who corrects (Heb. xii. 10).

II. The spirit and frame of mind in which he approaches God.

1. As regards himself—with self-abasement. "Deliver me from *blood-guiltiness.*" Is he not too hard upon himself? Had he actually slain Uriah? He had slain him by sword of children of Ammon (2 Sam. xii. 9). True penitent feels he cannot be too hard upon himself. Confesses sin in all its heinousness.

2. As regards God—with hope in His mercy. "*Deliver me . . . O God, Thou God of my salvation.*" Were not God the "God of my salvation," access with favour would be for ever denied. But He is "the God of whom cometh salva-

tion." And the God of *my* salvation when I approach Him through Jesus Christ.

III. The prayer of David. "Deliver me," &c. All of us must make this prayer our own. The blood-guiltiness of David was on account of murder of Uriah. Blood-guiltiness may be ours in one or other of three ways:

1. If condition not by grace changed, miserable in blood-guiltiness, because *crucified Son of God.*

2. If any of us stand condemned before God at last, miserable in blood-guiltiness, because *condemned suicides.* Salvation offered will have been despised. The Spirit resisted—Christ rejected.

3. At the last day shall have to *answer for others* (Gen. iv. 9; Prov. xxiv. 11, 12).

Is there not need that we say, with David, "*Deliver me,*" &c.?

In last clause of text, pious resolve for the future. Delivered from blood-guiltiness, cannot we take up language of Psalmist and say, "*And my mouth shall sing,*" &c.? Not our own, but His. The answer of peace comes to us in way of righteousness. Our theme of praise and thanksgiving on earth. And in heaven (Rev. v. 12). What shall I render unto the Lord? (Rom. xii. 1).—*R. C. Billing, B.A.* Abridged from "*The Homiletic Quarterly.*"

THE PROSPERITY OF ZION SOUGHT.

(Verse 18.)

"Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion." Consider—

I. The importance of the object sought. David prays for the prosperity of Zion.

1. *The Church is exposed to many dangers, and needs to be protected by an almighty arm.* David probably feared that by his own sin he had brought danger upon Zion; that God might justly manifest His displeasure by giving her into the hand of her enemies, or by withdrawing His favour from her. The Church of Christ needs *preservation* (1) from *sectarian or denominational strife*; (2) from *disunion and discord in individual churches*; (3) from *formality*; (4) from *prevalent errors*. Hence the importance of the prayer.

2. *The Church is imperfect, and its prosperity consists in its improvement.* "Do good in Thy," &c. "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants," &c. (Ps. xc. 16, 17). The prosperity of the Church is promoted—

(1) *When there is an increasing adherence to those truths on which primitive Christianity was established.*

(2) *When under the influence of these truths, the citizens of Zion are persevering in holiness.* "The path of the just is as the shining light," &c.

II. The grounds of encouragement we have in seeking this object. We might refer to some particulars suggested

by the words, "Thy good pleasure:" e.g., (α) that God is the Founder of His Church; (β) He established it at the greatest expense. Christ died to redeem it. (γ) In doing good to His Church He is glorifying His Son, who is "Head over all things to the Church;" (δ) The purposes and promises of God to the Church. But—

1. *To pray for Zion is a duty enjoined by Divine authority.* "Pray," said Christ, "hallowed be Thy name," &c. The security, improvement, and success of the Church depend upon prayer.

2. *God is the hearer of prayer.*

III. The manner in which we should seek this object. We may lose blessings through not seeking them aright. "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."

1. *We should ourselves be identified with the Church.* 2. *We should feel a deep interest in its welfare.* 3. *We should be constant in prayer for its prosperity; should seek it in our closets, in our families, &c.* 4. *We should unite in prayer for this object.* 5. *We should present our prayers in faith.* 6. *We should be importunate and fervent in prayer for this object.* Conclude by endeavouring to enforce this duty upon Christians.—Abridged from an unpublished MS.

PSALM LII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician, Maschil, a Psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech."

"To the Chief Musician," see on the title to Ps. xxxix.

"Maschil," an instruction, a didactic poem. "The didactic character of this Psalm," says Moll, "which is brought into prominence by the title, and its devotional aim, are especially noticeable, from the fact that, with respect to its form, the invocation of God, which is peculiar to prayers, lamentations, and hymns, is entirely absent; with respect to its contents, the mighty man, who, according to ver. 7, is proud of his riches, is upbraided for his impudence, wickedness, and falseness (vers. 1-4), the punishment of God, which will destroy him, is proclaimed (ver. 5), the action of the righteous, which will be called forth thereby, is contrasted with it (vers. 6, 7), and the lot and conduct of the pious Psalmist, corresponding with his trust in God's grace, is pronounced. It is advisable to abide by the statements of the title, and refer to the

informing of Doeg, the overseer of the royal asses (1 Sam. xxii. 9, *sqq.*), in consequence of which eighty-five priests were slaughtered, whilst David retained his courage, and expressed it to Abiathar, who escaped to David from that blood-bath, the son of Ahimelech, that priest of Nob, who had thoughtlessly given David, as the king's son-in-law, the shew-bread, and the sword of Goliath, which was hung up behind the ephod in the sanctuary, and this had excited the suspicion and vengeance of Saul, who now made Doeg, the informer of that act, likewise the executioner of his bloody sentence."

Homiletically, the Psalm sets before us an impressive beacon (vers. 1-5), and the effect upon the righteous of the judgment of God upon the wicked (vers. 6-9).

AN IMPRESSIVE BEACON.

(Verses 1-5.)

We have here—

I. The moral portrait of a wicked man. In this delineation of the moral features of Doeg the Edomite, we see,—

1. *Inventiveness in evil.* "Thy tongue deviseth mischief." The tongue uttered the mischiefs which the heart devised. He invented malicious speeches, and framed skilfully evil designs. Baron Huddleston, on April 23, 1877, in sentencing a prisoner to fifteen years' penal servitude, remarked, "That he was a man of great talent, and, if he had employed it in a proper manner, he might have obtained a position of the highest honour and respectability; but instead of this, he appeared to have devoted his mental strength against mankind." Like him of whom the judge spake, and like Doeg, there are many who are subtle and inventive in evil doing. Such deliberation in wickedness involves the greatest guilt.

2. *Rooted mendacity.* "Thou workest deceit . . . thou lovest lying . . . O deceitful tongue." M. Henry: "It may refer to the information which he gave in against Ahimelech; for the matter of fact was, in substance, true, yet it was misrepresented, and false colours were put upon it, and, therefore, he might well be said to love lying, and to have a deceitful tongue. He told the truth, but not all the truth, as a witness ought to do; had he told that David made Ahimelech believe he was then going upon Saul's errand, the kindness he showed him would have appeared to be not only not traitorous against Saul, but respectful to him. It will not save us from the guilt of lying to be able to say, 'There was some truth in what we said,' if we pervert it, and

make it appear otherwise than what it was." Beecher: "A lie always needs a truth for a handle to it, else the hand would cut itself which sought to drive it home upon another. The worst lies, therefore, are those whose blade is false, but whose handle is true."

3. *Cruel malignity.* "Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs like a sharp razor. Thou lovest all devouring words." Perowne: lit. "Words of swallowing up." His words were wounding as a sharp razor, and ruinous, as if they engulfed those against whom they were directed. "An untrue man is a moral murderer, his tongue the deadly weapon, and his neighbour the victim."

4. *Utter and terrible perversion of character.* "Thou lovest evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness." Moll: "The accused not only loves evil more than good, but he prefers evil to good, so that he loves it *instead of that* which he should love." What terrible moral perversion does this involve! He "boasted himself in mischief;" he triumphed in that which was his ignominy; he exulted in falsehood and cruelty. When sin is characterised by so much deliberation and malignity, when men love it, and make their boast in it, who can estimate its criminality?

In this moral portrait of a wicked man, have we not an impressive beacon warning us away from sin? Look upon it, and beware of falsehood, and all evil speaking. "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt." Look upon it, and, as you mark its unrelieved and utter blackness, beware of the beginnings of evil, &c.

II. Remonstrance with a wicked man. "Why boastest Thou thyself in

mischief, O mighty man?" &c. This inquiry implies—

1. *That his boasting was vain.* The folly of his boast appears from (1) the *nature* of his deeds. "O mighty man," or, "O hero!" "can only be sarcastic," says Moll. In what he had done he had exhibited no courage, no fortitude. A veritable hero art thou, Doeg! for thou didst first slander a noble man and a priest, and then thou didst courageously slay eighty-five unarmed priests, and then, O paragon of heroism! thou didst slay "women, children, and sucklings!" O valiant Doeg! Boast on, thou mighty man. The folly of his boast appears from (2) the *result* of his deeds. In his calculation of results Doeg had not taken account of God. "The goodness of God endureth continually." That is a guarantee of the ultimate security and well-being of the righteous, and of the destruction of the wicked. M. Henry: "Thou thinkest with the mischief which thou boastest of (so artfully contrived, and so successfully carried on), to run down and ruin the people of God; but thou wilt find thyself mistaken: the goodness of God endures continually for their preservation, and then they need not fear what man can do unto them. The enemies in vain boast in their mischief while we have God's mercy to boast in." They who now boast in their iniquities shall, ere long, be covered with reproach and confusion of face.

2. *That his boasting was wicked.* He was glorying in his shame. The deeds he had done had heavily weighted him with guilt; and, by glorying in them, he was increasing the burden of his criminality. To do evil is wrong; but to boast of having done it is far more

wrong. Let us heed this beacon. Sin is folly; but to boast of sin is the most egregious folly, and indicates the most deplorable moral depravity. Be rational, be wise, and shun sin.

III. *The doom of a wicked man.* "God shall likewise destroy thee for ever," &c. Doeg is here threatened with utter destruction, with irretrievable ruin.

1. *The ruin is complete and irretrievable.* He will destroy thee for ever," as walls are torn down to the ground, never more to be rebuilt. He will forcibly remove "thee from thy dwelling-place" for ever; and as a tree is torn up from the roots and so destroyed, so will He cut thee off out of the land of the living. A terrible destruction awaits the persistent workers of iniquity—the destruction of all that makes life worth having.

2. *The ruin is retributive.* "God shall likewise destroy thee," &c. "Likewise introduces the corresponding behaviour of another." "Destroyers shall be destroyed." "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Judg. i. 6, 7; Isa. iii. 10, 11).

Mark well, then, this impressive beacon. See the *enormity* to which wickedness may grow, and avoid the beginnings of evil; the *irrationality* of wickedness, and walk in the ways of wisdom; the *dread consummation* to which wickedness tends, and "abstain from all appearance of evil." "As righteousness tendeth to life; so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." Jesus Christ is the Almighty Saviour from sin. Trust Him; obey Him; and live.

THE EFFECT UPON THE RIGHTEOUS OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON THE WICKED.

(Verses 6-9.)

I. *The righteous behold the judgment of God upon the wicked.* "The righteous also shall see." The Psalmist expresses his confidence that the righteous would live to see the ruin of the wicked; that they who saw their sin,

should also see God's judgment on them because of their sin. This idea is more fully expressed by David in Ps. xxxvii. 34-36. The godly man shall live to see that a life of sin, however prosperous it may seem to be, leads to the destruction

of those who pursue it. "When the wicked are cut off thou shalt see." Even in the present state we may see that the issue of an upright life is blessed, and that of a sinful life is ruinous.

II. They are awed by the judgments of God upon the wicked. "The righteous also shall see, and fear." This fear is not slavish, but reverent. The godly stand in holy awe in the presence of the divine judgments, and fear lest they should transgress the law of God, and so expose themselves to their stroke. The most hardened sinner cannot stand before the judgments of the Almighty. And, inasmuch as every man by sin has merited His displeasure, we all have need to humble ourselves at the footstool of the Divine mercy. When the righteous see the judgments of God, the effect upon them is most salutary: they fear Him, they shun sin, &c.

III. They approve the judgment of God upon the wicked. "The righteous shall laugh at him." There is a laughter because of the fall of the wicked which is sinful (Job xxxi. 29; Prov. xxiv. 17, 18). There is also a laughter because of the Divine judgments upon them which is lawful and right, viz., the laughter of joy, because of the triumph of the Divine government. Moll: "If they *laugh*, it is not a laughing in the joy of injuring, in scorn and reproaching, but the bringing into view the *absurd inconsistency* in which the ungodly have become involved by their *abandonment of God*." Barnes: "The idea here is not exultation in the *sufferings* of others, or joy that *calamity* has come upon them, or the gratification of selfish and revengeful feeling that an enemy is deservedly punished; it is that of approbation that punishment has come upon those who deserve it, and joy that wickedness is not allowed to triumph. This may be entirely free from any malignant or any revengeful feeling. It may even be connected with the deepest pity, and with the purest benevolence towards the sufferers themselves." "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of nations."

IV. They are instructed by the judgment of God upon the wicked. "Behold the man that maketh not God his

strength," &c. Perowne: "The words in which the righteous express their triumph, pointing, as it were, to the fallen oppressor, and the lesson to be learnt from his overthrow." Here are three lessons—

1. *That to trust in wealth is folly.* "Behold the man that trusted in the abundance of his riches." It would appear from this verse that Doeg was a rich man, and had great faith in the power of his wealth. Barnes: "He had that spirit of arrogance and self-confidence which springs from the conscious possession of property where there is no fear of God; and into all that he did he carried the sense of his own importance as derived from riches." Comp. Ps. xlix. 6; Prov. x. 15, xviii. 11.

2. *That the strength of wickedness is weakness.* He "strengthened himself in wickedness." By subtle and evil devices he endeavoured to establish himself, and fancied himself secure therein. No deeds which he deemed would increase his power, ever gave him pause because of their wickedness. He who builds his hopes upon wicked devices, even though they be framed with the utmost skill, builds upon sand. Utter ruin is the destiny of the fabric which he rears. Wickedness is weakness. Lies must perish. Truth and righteousness alone are abiding and strong.

3. *That God is the only adequate support of human life.* "The man made not God his strength," and his end was destruction. A consideration of His almighty power, infinite wisdom, unchanging faithfulness, and essential kindness, is calculated to inspire strong confidence in the all-sufficiency of God as the support of human life. And there is no other adequate support. Wealth, wisdom, rank, power, friendship, &c., are insufficient. He who leans upon any or upon all of them is doomed to bitter disappointment and a grievous fall. Such are the lessons which the poet learned from the judgment of God upon the wicked.

V. They flourish in the midst of the judgment of God upon the wicked. "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God," &c. Consider—

1. *The nature of this happy state.* The state of the Psalmist was characterised by (1) *Divine security.* Barnes: "A tree planted in the very courts of the sanctuary would be regarded as sacred, and would be safe as long as the tabernacle itself was safe, for it would be, as it were, directly under the Divine protection. So David had been, notwithstanding all the efforts of his enemies to destroy him." The righteous are inviolably secure from any real harm, for the Lord is their keeper (Ps. cxv. 1, 2; Rom. viii. 31, 37). (2) *Religious privileges.* David looked forward with confidence and gladness to the termination of his exile and his return to the sanctuary. To him the tabernacle and the ordinances of worship were precious and hallowed things. The people of God find strength and joy in the means of grace, while the wicked are overthrown by their own wickedness. (3) *Spiritual prosperity.* In the Scriptures a green tree is the emblem of prosperity (Ps. i. 3, xcii. 12; Jer. xi. 16). M. Henry: "Those that by faith and love dwell in the house of God shall be like green olive-trees there; the wicked are said to flourish like a green bay-tree (Ps. xxxvii. 35), which bears no useful fruit, though it has abundance of large leaves; but the righteous flourish like a green olive-tree, which is fat as well as flourishing (Ps. xcii. 14), and with its fatness honours God and man (Judg. ix. 9), deriving its root and fatness from the good olive (Rom. xi. 17)." Notwithstanding the bitter opposition of the wicked, the people of God shall grow in grace, and bring forth the fruits of holy living and useful working.

"When wrath the wicked shall destroy,
They shall abide in peace and joy
Who love Thy righteous laws."

2. *The condition of this happy state.* "I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." The Psalmist was well assured of the constancy, the unchangeableness, and the perpetuity of the mercy of God, and in that he trusted. Faith in God is the condition of spiritual safety and prosperity.

VI. They worship God because of His judgment upon the wicked. "I will praise Thee for ever because," &c. The judgments of God as viewed by the righteous—

1. *Incite to praise.* "I will praise Thee," &c. They reveal the righteousness of His administration; His regard for His people, &c.; and so enkindle gratitude, reverence, &c.

2. *Inspire confidence.* "And will wait on Thy name." Barnes: "There are two ideas essentially in the language. (1) The expression of a sense of dependence on God, as if the only ground of trust was in Him. (2) A willingness to await His interposition at all times; a belief that, however long such interposition might be delayed, God would interfere at the proper time to bring deliverance; and a purpose calmly and patiently to look to Him until the time of deliverance should come" (Ps. xxvii. 14, xxxvii. 7, 9, 34; Is. xl. 31).

APPLICATION.—1. *What is our relation to the Divine judgments?* 2. *What is the ground of our confidence?* Is it wealth? or the power of cunning and unscrupulous wickedness? or the Lord God? 3. *What is the spirit and what the condition of our life?*

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN RICHES.

(Verse 7.)

"Behold the man that trusted in the abundance of his riches." We have here—

I. A great mistake. To trust in riches is to err greatly:

1. *Because of the uncertainty of the tenure of riches.* "Labour not to be rich: for riches certainly make them-

selves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (1 Tim. vi. 17). At the farthest we must relinquish them at death (Ps. xlix. 17; Eccles. v. 15).

2. *Because of the limited power of riches.* Wealth can do much, but there are many things which it cannot do. It can buy books, but not intellectual

power; paintings, but not appreciative taste; service and sycophancy, but not esteem and affection, &c. It cannot buy pardon, peace, purity, &c. It cannot bribe death, &c.

3. *Because of the utter inability of riches to satisfy those who possess them.* He who has much wealth would fain have more. The cravings of the soul of man, created for truth, immortality, and God, cannot be satisfied with the bribes which wealth can offer. How mistaken then is he who trusts in wealth!

II. A common mistake. The great race of the age is for the acquisition of wealth. If you ask what a *man* is worth, people tell you how much money he possesses. Manhood is sacrificed for money. Riches are the deity of thousands in Christian England.

III. A ruinous mistake if persisted in. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" "Thy money perish with thee." (Comp. Luke xii. 15-21.)

PSALM LIII.

INTRODUCTION.

According to the superscription this Psalm was composed by David and dedicated "To the Chief Musician;" to be used in public worship under his direction. The term "*upon Mahalath*" is variously interpreted. In the Geneva version it is rendered, "To him that excellet on Mahalath;" which is explained in the margin to be "an instrument or kind of note." "This expresses the opinions of most commentators. Aben Ezra understands by it the name of a melody to which the Psalm was sung. Calvin and J. H. Michaelis, among others, regarded it as an instrument of music, or the commencement of a melody. Fuerst explains Mahalath as the name of a musical corps dwelling at Abel-Meholah, just as by Gittith he understands the band of Levite minstrels at Gath Rimmon. On the other hand, the opinion that Mahalath contains an enigmatical indication of the subject of the Psalm is adopted by Hengstenberg to the exclusion of every other. He translates 'on Mahalath' by 'on sickness,' referring to the spiritual malady of the sons of men. A third theory is that of Delitzsch, who considers Mahalath as indicating to the choir the manner in which the Psalm was to be sung, and compares the modern terms *mesto*, and *andante mesto*" (Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*). The term "*Maschil*" shows that the Psalm was designed to afford instruction.

This Psalm is almost exactly similar to Ps. xiv. The only difference which requires notice here is between verses 5 and 6 of Ps. xiv. and verse 5 of this one.

"There were they in great fear; for God is in the generation of the righteous. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge" (xiv. 5, 6.)

"There were they in great fear, where no fear was; for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them."

For the chief exposition we refer the reader to "*The Hom. Com.*" on Ps. xiv. We add, as supplementary to that, a few Homiletic suggestions.

GOD INSPECTING MAN.

(Verse 2.)

"The original word here—שָׁקַף," says Barnes, "conveys the idea of bending forward, and hence of an intense and anxious looking, as we bend forward when we wish to examine anything with attention, or when we look out for one who is expected to come. The idea is, that God looked intently, or so as to secure a close examination, upon the children of men, for the express purpose of ascertaining whether there were any

that were good. He looked at all men; He examined all their pretensions to goodness, and He saw none who could be regarded as exempt from the charge of depravity." The text suggests—

I. God's profound interest in humanity. He bows Himself forward, and, with zeal and concern, examines man's moral state. Such is the form in which important truths are represented—this amongst others, that the

Most High is deeply interested in man's moral condition? Why is He so?

1. *Because of the dignity of man's nature.* To God nothing is unimportant—nothing mean. But man is the noblest of His creations in this world. "God created man in His own image."

2. *Because of the peculiarity of man's moral condition.* By disobedience man entered into the dread knowledge of evil. Unfallen angels are entirely holy. Fallen angels are utterly depraved. In human nature the battle between good and evil is being waged.

3. *Because of the capabilities of man's nature.* Man is capable of rising to the highest or sinking to the lowest position in the universe of God. It would be passing strange if God were not deeply interested in man. Nothing that concerns thee, my brother, is unimportant in the Divine estimation.

II. God's searching scrutiny of humanity. The poet represents him as earnestly examining "the children of men." His is the scrutiny of—

1. *An all-seeing Being.* Nothing can be hidden from His all-searching eye (Ps. cxxxix. 11-16; Ezek. xi. 5; Heb. iv. 13).

2. *An infinitely holy Being.* He hates sin with awful and unappeasable hatred. His dwelling, His ways, His works, His essential nature, are all holy (Isa. lvii. 15; Hab. i. 12, 13; 1 John i. 5; Rev. iv. 8).

3. *An infinitely merciful Being.* "A God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." If there be in us any sincere efforts after truth and righteousness, He sees and approves them. In His judgment of His creatures He makes allowance for their weakness, for the force of temptation, &c. He is not harsh, &c. His holiness which leads Him to hate sin leads Him also to seek the salvation of the sinner. Such is the Being who is ever earnestly observing man, examining man. How solemn and sacred should our life be, since it is ever under His inspection! What an inspiration and encouragement does this inspection afford

to the godly! What a restraint it should prove to the workers of iniquity! "For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

III. The supreme concern of humanity. Why does God so earnestly examine man? "To see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God." As these are the things which God desires to discover in man, man's great concern should be to have and to exercise them. We should seek—

1. *Moral intelligence.* "Understand," or act prudently—the antithesis of the fool in ver. 1. Not intellectual attainment, but practical wisdom.

"Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one, Have oftentimes no connection. Knowledge dwells

In heads replete with thoughts of other men; Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.

Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass, The mere materials with which wisdom builds, Till smooth'd, and squared, and fitted to its place,

Does but encumber whom it seems t'enrich. Knowledge is proud that he has learn'd so much;

Wisdom is humble that he knows no more."

—Cowper.

"The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way."

2. *Divine aspiration.* "Seek God." Hengstenberg: "To seek God, designates the desire of the heart after Him, the longing directed towards Him." Where there is any true wisdom, or any spiritual life, it will manifest itself in seeking fellowship and union with God. Only through the mediation of Jesus Christ can this union be obtained. Our well-being is impossible apart from Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. *He who now scrutinises will one day judge man.* 2. *His judgment of man is infallible.* He deliberately, patiently, and thoroughly examines into every case before pronouncing judgment. 3. *He is also the merciful Saviour of men.* 4. *Our supreme interest is to seek to know Him as our Saviour.*

THE SALVATION OF THE CHURCH AND THE DESTRUCTION OF HER ENEMIES.

(Verses 5, 6.)

The poet here represents the destruction of the wicked—

I. As utter and irreversible. "God hath scattered the bones of thy besiegers." The figure points to the most complete and terrible destruction of the enemies of the Church. Not only is their power broken and their forces dispersed, but they are slain, and their bones, unburied, are scattered upon the earth. Moll: "It was the greatest disgrace that the bones which had not been gathered and buried should be scattered to become the prey of wild beasts, or manure of the field" (Ps. cxli. 7; Jer. viii. 2, ix. 22, xvi. 4, xxv. 33; Ezek. vi. 5). The wicked must either submit themselves unto God, or suffer irretrievable overthrow. If any one will resist Him to the uttermost, by so doing he will bring upon himself utter destruction (Job ix. 4, xl. 9).

II. As effected by God. "God hath scattered," &c. Doubtless there is an historical allusion here. Most probably the allusion is to the destruction of the vast and mighty host of Sennacherib before Jerusalem. In one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians were slain by "the angel of the Lord." "I will defend this city to save it," said the Lord, "for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake." There was no battle. He needed no assistance. With the breath of his nostrils he slew them. How insane for any creature to battle against Him! He can crush the mightiest with a word, or wither the most vigorous with one glance of His eye!

III. As overtaking them when they regarded themselves as quite secure. "There were they in great fear where no fear was." It is incorrect to interpret this as groundless alarm or unnecessary fear. The meaning is, that when the enemies of the Israelites saw no reason to be terrified, and felt themselves entirely safe, suddenly and utterly contrary to their expectation, destruc-

tion overtook them. "A sound of terrors is in his ears; in prosperity," &c. (Job xv. 21). "When they shall say, Peace and safety," &c. (1 Thess. v. 3). In opposition to God there can be no safety, under any circumstances. In alliance with Him there can be no real peril, however threatening the aspect of affairs may be. (Comp. 2 Chron. xx. 1-30.)

IV. As inflicted because of their hostility to the people of God. The enemy was utterly overthrown because he was besieging the chosen people. No one can attempt to injure even the least of the people of God without calling forth His interposition.

1. *He is in covenant relation with His people, and is pledged to help them.* He is ever true to His covenant engagements. "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself."

2. *He is profoundly and tenderly interested in His people* (Isa. xlix. 14-16; Matt. xviii. 5, 6, xxv. 40, 45; Acts ix. 4). From these portions of Scripture it is quite clear that He identifies Himself with them: what is done against them He regards as done against Him; what is done for them, as done for Him. In this we have—(1) An inspiring and strengthening consideration for the people of God. (2) Motive and encouragement to those who would aid them. (3) Warning to those who would injure them.

V. The destruction of the wicked in former times as an encouragement to the good to expect salvation from present dangers. This we take to be the connecting link between verses 5 and 6. "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion," &c. Notice—

1. *The poetic view of salvation.* It is here represented as deliverance from captivity. Captivity is a figure to represent restraint, misery, &c. "Turning the captivity" is a figure for the turning of an unhappy condition into a restoration to former prosperity. A state of

sin is a state of bondage and misery. The Lord Jesus introduces man to freedom and joy.

2. *The grand source of salvation.* "Out of Zion," &c., because there the Lord was enthroned in the sanctuary as in His habitation. The salvation of man from the sins and sorrows of life can come only from God. It is His to "proclaim liberty to the captives," &c.

3. *The earnest desire of salvation.* "Oh that the salvation of Israel," &c. Our fervent desires are our true prayers. Through all ages the prayers of true hearts have been offered for the redemption of the world from sin and misery.

4. *The anticipated result of salvation.* "Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad." To the individual the realisation of salvation is a joyous experience. And when its blessings shall be enjoyed by all mankind, the exultation will be

universal in its extent, and enthusiastic and reverent in its character. And unto God shall all the glory be ascribed.

5. *The encouragement to expect salvation.* Past deliverances inspire the poet with confident hope of salvation from present difficulties and dangers. God is unchangeable. What He has done in the past He is able to do in the present. He is faithful. What He has promised that will He perform. Every new deliverance is an additional reason for trusting Him. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

"His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink:
Each sweet Ebenezer
I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure
To help me quite through."—*Newton*.

PSALM LIV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician on Neginoth." There is very little doubt that "*Neginoth*" is "the general term denoting all stringed instruments whatsoever, whether played with the hand, like the harp and guitar, or with a plectrum. 'The chief musician on Neginoth' was therefore the conductor of that portion of the Temple-choir, who played upon the stringed instruments."—*Smith's Dict. of the Bible*.

"*Maschil*," an instruction. Berleb. Bible—"We should learn from the example of David that even in the greatest danger we should resort to no forbidden means, nor grow faint, but should call upon the name of God, and commit to Him all our concerns as to the Supreme Judge."

"*A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims*," &c. The psalm was composed by David when the Ziphites informed Saul that David concealed himself in their country. This occurred on two occasions, 1 Sam. xxiii. 19; xxvi. 1. Probably the first of these is referred to here, as the words of the superscription literally agree with the words of the Ziphites, as reported in 1 Sam. xxiii. 19. The psalm, says Moll, "is plain and simple in form and contents. It expresses at first a *prayer* to God for deliverance in a just cause from dreaded ungodly enemies (vers. 1-3). It then expresses, in a lively manner, *confidence* in the Divine help and the punishment of His enemies (vers. 4, 5); finally it concludes with the *vow of thanksgiving* for such acts of God in confirmation of His name."

Homiletically we regard the psalm as presenting to view *The troubled life of a good man* vers. 1-3; and, *The triumphant life of a good man*, vers. 4-7.

A GLIMPSE OF A TROUBLED LIFE.

(Verses 1-3.)

Consider—

I. *The cause of the trouble.* "For strangers are risen up against me," &c. His distress arose from his enemies, whom he here represents as—

1. *Unnatural.* "Strangers are risen

up against me." The expression is not to be taken literally as denoting foreigners, "since the inhabitants of Ziph, a town situated in the mountain wilderness of Judah, a few miles south-east of Hebron, were of the same race as

David." His own countrymen had become as foreigners to him, had treated him as an enemy. The Psalmist, like St. Paul in an after age, was in "perils among false brethren." Dickson: "No strangers are more strange than they who cast off the bands of civility and nature, whereby they were bound: false countrymen, false brethren, false friends, false alliance, are those of whom men may expect least in their need, for David findeth such men to be his greatest enemies."

2. *Cruel.* "Oppressors seek after my soul." As a cruel tyrant, Saul was seeking to compass the death of David. Nothing less than the precious life itself would satisfy the jealous and malignant monarch.

3. *Practically atheistic.* "They have not set God before them." Arnd.: "Not to have God before the eyes, means to speak and act without dread, whatever one pleases—nay, what is contrary to God and His holy Word, as if God did not see and hear it; nor to be afraid of God's anger, or of His judgment, and to have no remembrance of God in the heart." When men thus ignore the Divine Being, can we wonder that they trample under foot all ideas of humanity and justice in their treatment of their fellow-men? So we have a glimpse of this troubled life. Externally the poet knew no safety or peace; he was hunted from place to place with unrelenting cruelty, &c. We, too, know the meaning of trouble, and are not unacquainted with false brethren and fierce enemies, &c.

II. *The comfort in the trouble.* The Psalmist found relief and help in prayer to God.

1. *The object of his prayer.* He prayed for audience and acceptance.

"Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth." But the grand object of his prayer was *deliverance from his dangers*, salvation from his troubles. "Save me, O God, by Thy name," &c. David seems to have been aware that the Ziphites had informed Saul of his whereabouts; he felt how perilous his position was; and he appealed to God for protection and deliverance.

2. *The encouragement of his prayer.* This he drew from two sources. (1) *The Being to whom he prayed.* (a) His power to save. "Judge me by Thy strength." He will "show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." "Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is Thy hand, high is Thy right hand." (β) The perfections of His nature. "Save me, O God, by Thy name." Barnes: "The word '*name*' here may include the perfections or attributes properly implied in the name." It implies all the benevolence, faithfulness, and power that were needed to warrant the most sanguine hope of salvation from Him. (2) *The righteousness of his cause.* "Judge me." These words indicate that David was conscious of the righteousness of his cause. If he obtained his rights in the case, he would be triumphantly delivered. Arnd.: "From these words we learn, if we would pray rightly, and indeed would make a strong, powerful prayer, we must have a good cause, so that our conscience may not condemn us, and render our prayer impotent."

CONCLUSION.—Learn 1. *What the good may not expect in this life*: exemption from trouble. 2. *What the good may expect in this life*: support and comfort in trouble. Let us seek it in prayer, as David did.

A GLIMPSE OF A TRIUMPHANT LIFE.

(Verses 4-7.)

The outward life of the Psalmist at this time was characterised by constant peril and trial; but his inward life was marked by peace and triumph. Consider—

I. *The nature of the triumphant life.* The poet brings into notice two prominent features of this life—

1. *Faith.* Faith is the soul of all heroisms, whether of patient endurance,

or brave, persistent performance. David believed in (1) *God*. To him God was not a myth or the mere article of a creed to which he had assented; but the grand Reality of being. His faith was living and realising in its character. He felt the presence of God with him, &c. (2) *The righteousness of God's government*. "He shall reward evil unto mine enemies." Notwithstanding his present distresses, David was fully persuaded of the righteousness of the Divine laws and administration. Ultimately the apparent inequalities in God's government of the world will all be removed. Men will be retributed according to their character and conduct. (3) *God's interest in the individual life of those who trust Him*. "Behold, God is mine Helper," &c. God is personally interested in every one whose confidence is reposed in Him. In his distressing wanderings, David never passed beyond the Divine care. In his extremest danger he was covered by the shield of the Divine protection. It was his faith in these things that enabled him to live a triumphant life, even in the midst of incessant persecutions and perils. It is true of all men and in all ages that LIFE CAN BECOME VICTORIOUS ONLY THROUGH FAITH. Faith enlarging the horizon of life, realising the future and invisible, feeling the presence of God, and resting in His promises, transforms common men into heroes (Heb. xi. 32-40).

2. *Worship*. "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee," &c. Here we have (1) *The forms of worship*. "Sacrifice, . . . praise." Forms are indispensable to us. They express, and, by expressing, often increase, religious feeling. (2) *The spirit of worship*. "Freely." This is not to be interpreted as signifying either (a) Spiritual as opposed to ceremonial offerings; or (b) Voluntary sacrifices as contrasted to those offered in fulfilment of vows;

but (γ) Offerings brought with a willing mind and a glad heart. Sacrifice and praise, gifts and songs, are acceptable unto God and helpful to man only in the measure of their spontaneousness and heartiness. Here is another thing which contributed to the triumph of the Psalmist,—he delighted in worship. Worship calms, emboldens, strengthens man. Faith and worship are of the essential nature of a victorious life.

II. The conquering power of the triumphant life.

1. *It gives assurance of victory*. "Behold, God is mine helper," &c., vers. 4, 5. The believer in Christ has an unfailing assurance that, through Him, he will vanquish all his enemies.

2. *It enables its possessor to realise the deliverance, and to triumph even in the midst of the trouble and conflict*. "He hath delivered me out of all trouble," &c. The victorious spirit enables David, even in the midst of his anxieties and perils, to realise (1) Complete deliverance from trouble; and (2) Complete triumph over his enemies. "Mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies." Wordsworth: "The words '*his desire*' are not in the original, and would be better omitted. What David says is, that his eyes look calmly on his enemies: he views them without alarm; for he feels that the shield of God's power and love is cast over him to protect him."

CONCLUSION.—Let us thankfully rejoice in the victorious life. Even now, while beset by troubles and confronted by enemies, we triumph in and through Jesus our Lord. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace," &c. (John xvi. 33). "We glory in tribulations also," &c. (Rom. v. 3-5). "In all these things we are more than conquerors," &c. (Rom. viii. 31-39). "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ."

GOD OUR HELPER.

(Verse 4.)

"Behold, God is mine helper."

Man often stands in need of Divine help. It is good and pleasant to enjoy the help of our fellow-saints; but their help is limited, uncertain, and often valueless. Not so God—He is possessed of every qualification, so there never can be failure with him. Notice—

I. When God is the helper of His people.

1. *In the great crisis of their conversion.* He raiseth from the pit, delivers, saves, &c.

2. *In the troubles and afflictions of life.* These are many, varied, sometimes severe, &c. Job, the Apostles (2 Cor. i. 8-10).

3. *In the perils and conflicts of their warfare* (Ps. xxxvii. 14, 15; lx. 11, 12; cxlvi. 5).

4. *In their labours and toils in His kingdom* (Ps. cxxi. 1, 2).

5. *In weakness, sickness, and death* (Ps. xxiii. 4; cxvi. 1-9).

II. What kind of a Helper is God.

1. *Always near at hand.* 2. *Always efficient and sufficient.* 3. *Perpetual and everlasting.*

III. The conclusions to which the subject should lead us.

1. *Personal knowledge and reliance on God.*

2. *Unwavering faith and hope.*

3. *Constant prayer and supplication.* He will be sought and inquired of.

4. *Acknowledgment and praise.* "Bless the Lord at all times," &c.—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

PSALM LV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician on Neginoth." See introduction to Ps. liv. "*Maschil*," an instruction. Hengstenberg: "The Psalmist wishes to show how, in such a situation of excitement, a person should conduct himself; how he should carry up what has occasioned it to God, and compose himself to rest again through the consideration of God's love and righteousness."

Occasion.—We have no doubt that the psalm has an historical reference; but to what occasion it refers cannot now be determined with certainty. Barnes: "Of all the known events in the life of David, the supposition which regards the psalm as composed during the rebellion of Absalom, and at the special time when he learned that the man whom he trusted—Ahiathophel—was among the traitors, is the most probable. All the circumstances in the psalm agree with his condition at that time, and the occasion was one in which the persecuted and much-afflicted king would be likely to pour out the desires of his heart before God" (2 Sam. xv. 10-31).

A CRY FROM A SOUL IN DISTRESS.

(Verses 1-8.)

This cry of the troubled Psalmist reveals—

I. The cause of his distress. This was the conduct of his enemies as set forth in ver. 3—

1. *Their evil speeches.* "Because of the voice of the enemy." At this time David was assailed with reproaches, slanders, and threats (2 Sam. xv. 3, 4). (See "*The Hom. Com.*," on Ps. xli. 5-9; xlii. 2.)

2. *Their wicked deeds.* "Because of the oppression of the wicked; for they cast iniquity upon me." Hengstenberg renders the last clause thus: "for they bend mischief over me." And Conant: "For they cause mischief to impend over me." Absalom and Ahiathophel and their followers were doing their utmost to take away both the kingdom and the life of the poet-king. Their evil doings were an intolerable burden

to him, beneath which his heart fainted and his strength failed.

3. *Their deadly hatred.* "In wrath they hate me." Hengstenberg: "In wrath they persecute me." Conant: "In anger they lay a snare for me." They had nursed their ambitious and wicked schemes until their hearts were full of deep and deadly hatred against him who stood in the way and prevented their attainment. "There was in their enmity both the heat and violence of anger, or sudden passion, and the implacableness of hatred and rooted malice."

II. *The description of his distress.* The Psalmist represents himself as suffering—

1. *Great mental anxiety.* This seems to be the idea of the second clause of ver. 2. "I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise." Moll: "I reel to and fro in my complaint and must groan." Conant: "I am restless in my complaining and disquieted." Perowne: "אָרִיר from a verb, רָר, which occurs in three other passages, Gen. xxvii. 40; Jer. ii. 31; Hos. xii. 1. Properly it signifies to wander restlessly, especially as homeless, without fixed abode, &c. Here it is used of the restless tossing to and fro of the mind, filled with cares and anxieties." The mind of David was at this time exercised by the most anxious thought as to the measures he should adopt, and the course he should pursue for his own safety and the good of his distracted realm.

2. *Deep pain of heart.* "My heart is sore pained within me." Moll: "'My heart writhes within me.' The trouble is not merely an external one, it affects his bowels, his vitals, his inmost soul." David was deeply wounded in the innermost and most sensitive part of his nature. His own son whom he loved was the head and origin of the rebellion. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." And his bosom friend whom he trusted, Abithophel, was chief counsellor of the rebels. Well may his "heart writhe within" him.

3. *Overwhelming and unspeakable dread.* "The terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling

are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me." Hengstenberg: "The terrors of death seize the Psalmist, because the enemies threaten his life." Barnes: "'Horror hath overwhelmed me.' Marg., as in Heb., 'covered me.' That is, it had come upon him so as to cover or envelop him entirely. The shades of horror and despair spread all around and above him, and all things were filled with gloom. The word rendered *horror* occurs only in three other places; Ezek. vii. 18, rendered (as here, *horror*; Job xxi. 6, rendered *trembling*; and Is. xxi. 4, rendered *fearfulness*. It refers to that state when we are deeply agitated with fear." If we think of the scenes and circumstances through which David was passing, we shall see that they were likely to occasion feelings so deep and painful and dreadful, that even the strong language here used does not adequately express them. "The ingratitude and rebellion of a son,—the fact of being driven away from his throne,—the number of his enemies,—the unexpected news that Abithophel was among them,—and the entire uncertainty of the result, justified the use of this strong language."

III. *His desire in his distress.* "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove," &c. He desires to escape quickly from the wrath and strife of men to the peace and safety of Nature's retirements,—to get away from the falsity and cruelty of human society into the solitudes of true and kindly Nature. Jeremiah: "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of way-faring men; that I might leave my people and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men."

"Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more. My ear is
pain'd,
My soul is sick with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is
fill'd."—Cowper.

The Psalmist desired to depart (1) *quickly*. "Wings like a dove" is a figure of rapid flight. "I would hasten

my escape." (2) *Completely*. "I would wander far off." "I would make the distance far by wandering." He would completely separate himself from the strife and tumult of the city and human society. (3) *Permanently*. "I would flee away, and abide." "This is more literal, and more in accordance with the parallelism than the translation, '*be at rest*,' of the A. V.;" and is adopted by Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, Hupfield, Moll, *et al.*

1. *This desire was natural*. There was no feeling of revenge in it. He did not sigh for the wings of a hawk to fly upon the prey, but for those of the innocent dove, to escape from the birds of prey. Suffering as he was from men whom he had loved and trusted, it was natural that David should long to escape from man to nature, and to have done with the faithless and ungrateful.

2. *This desire was mistaken*. If he had obtained his wish, the issue would probably have been disappointing. Our well-being and joy depend on our inner condition, not on our outward circumstances. If the brain and heart be unquiet themselves, neither society nor solitude can give them rest. If the peace of God be in the soul, the world's most tumultuous and trying scenes cannot deprive us of it.

3. *This desire was significant*. To us it clearly suggests that there is for man a *place* as well as a state of rest. The longing of the heart for rest is prophetic of a realm where peaceful souls dwell amid peaceful circumstances. There is a world into which sin and sorrow and strife never enter; but it is not here. Our rest, our home, is not here. "Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest," &c.

IV. *His prayer in his distress*. "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not Thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me." These petitions involve a large measure of faith in God.

1. *In His accessibility*. David believed in the possibility and privilege of man speaking unto his Maker. He regarded God as the hearer of prayer.

2. *In His intreatibleness*. "Hide not Thyself," &c. Arnd: "In great straits, it seems as if God hides Himself from us, as the prophet Jeremiah speaks in chap. iii. of his Lamentations: 'Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.' But our gracious God cannot hide Himself from our prayer; the prayer does still press through the clouds and find Him. God's fatherly heart does not permit Him to hear us cry and beg, without turning to us, as a father when he hears his children cry." David regarded God as the answerer of prayer.

3. *In His sufficiency*. The Psalmist was convinced that if God graciously received his prayer and entertained his case, it would be well with him notwithstanding the malice and might and multitude of his foes. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly," &c.

CONCLUSION. — Learn: 1. *That the best of men in this world are exposed to severest trials*. 2. *That religion does not make men insensible to pain and grief*. 3. *That religion provides for men an all-sufficient resource in trial*. Prayer to a gracious, all-wise, and almighty Friend. 4. *That religion faithfully promises full and blessed satisfaction to man's craving for rest*. (1) Here the rest of faith, satisfied affections, &c.—rest amidst trial, peace in conflict. (2) Hereafter, in addition to this rest of soul, complete rest from conflict, trial, suffering, and sin.

"There shall no tempests blow,
No scorching noontide heat;
There shall be no more snow,
No weary wand'ring feet;
So we lift our trusting eyes
From the hills our fathers trod,
To the quiet of the skies
To the Sabbath of our God."

—Hemans.

SAD SCENES AND PAINFUL EXPERIENCES.

(Verses 9-15.)

"The tone of sadness and melancholy now gives way to one of hot and passionate indignation;" and the poet sketches the sad scenes which he had witnessed in the city, and the painful experiences through which he had passed.

I. Sore evils in the city. "I have seen violence and strife in the city," &c., vers. 9-11.

1. *The evils were manifold in form.* Here we have:—(1) Rebellion against the civil power. "Violence and strife in the city." (2) Extortion and fraud in commerce. "Deceit and guile depart not from her streets." Hengstenberg: "There depart not from its market oppression and deceit." Conant: "From her market-place depart not extortion and deceit." The word which is rendered "streets" and "markets" denotes "the large open spaces at the gates of the oriental cities, where were the markets, the courts of justice, and general places of public concourse." Every phase of life seems to have become depraved. "Wickedness was in the midst" of the city.

2. *The evils were universal in extent.* They were "in the city" and going "about it upon the walls;" they were "in the midst thereof" and in the open spaces before the gates. "The city was wholly and utterly filled with wickedness."

3. *The evils were continuous in their activities.* "Day and night they go about," &c. They "depart not," &c. Wickedness was unwearied and incessant in its doings.

4. *The evils were painful in their results.* "Mischievous and sorrow are in the midst of it." Conant: "Trouble and sorrow are within her." The whole city in all its parts and at all times was full of wickedness; and the result was distress and grief. Where wickedness abounds, misery will not be wanting. Sin is the fruitful parent of sorrow. It is well that trouble does follow transgression. We wonder not that David's

heart was stirred with grief and indignation as he beheld the city so filled with untiring wickedness and sore anguish. No person of enlightened piety can contemplate the sins and sorrows of a great city without emotions of deep grief and earnest solicitude.

The poet also sketches some of his own painful experiences.

II. Base treachery in friendship. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me," &c., vers. 12-14. We see here:—

1. *Friendship enjoyed.* The Psalmist dwells upon this point with touching minuteness. He shows us a friendship: (1) Of great intimacy and trust. "A man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." "Mine equal." "Friendship, according to the rule, 'binds only equals,' and these, wherever it actually obtains, with peculiarly intimate bonds." "My guide." "אֱלֹהִי is here not guide, but companion, associate, one joined in intimate communion." Barnes: "The phrase 'mine acquaintance' is a feeble expression, and does not convey the full force of the original, which denotes a more intimate friend than would be suggested by the word 'acquaintance.' It is language applied to one whom we thoroughly know, and who knows us; and this exists only in the case of very intimate friends." David had regarded Ahithophel as such a friend. (2) In holiest engagements. "We walked into the house of God in company." More correctly: "We walked into the house of God in the festal crowd." They united as dear friends in acts of sacred worship to the one God. "The fellowship of devotion entwines the hearts of men with the most tender cords." Such friendships should triumph over death itself. (3) Affording great pleasure. "We took sweet counsel together." Literally: "We sweetened counsel together." Their familiar converse was mutually delightful. In public and in private, in religion and in politics, their

friendship had been most intimate and confiding and pleasurable.

2. *Friendship violated.* (1) By slander. "It was not an enemy that reproached me." This trusted friend had taken part with his detractors and calumniators (2 Sam. xv. 31). (2) By base and cruel opposition. "Magnify himself against me." Conant: "Hath acted proudly against me." The treacherous man was seeking to accomplish the downfall and ruin of David, that he might thereby rise to greater distinction and power. So the tender and holy bonds of friendship, which should ever be softer than gossamer, yet stronger than cable, were utterly outraged.

3. *Friendship injured and complaining.* David felt that he had been bitterly wronged, and very pathetically he complains of the wrong. His complaint suggests that the hostility of those we counted friends, is—(1) *More painful* than that of enemies. "It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it." Berleb. Bible: "For from such one would expect nothing better, and might still find consolation respecting it from one's friends." The treachery of those whom we have taken into our innermost confidence is one of the most bitter of life's experiences. (2) *More perilous* than that of enemies. "Then I would have hid myself from him." We can guard against the injuries of an open, or of a suspected enemy; but who can guard against the injuries of a secret, treacherous foe, whom we regard and trust as a friend? (3) *More criminal* than that of enemies. Such hostility outrages the tenderest and holiest feelings, and violates the most sacred obligations. Such were some of the painful experiences of the poet at this time. Alas, that thousands have drank of the same bitter cup!

"Where you are liberal of your loves and counsel

Be sure you be not loose; for those you make friends,

And give your hearts to, when they once perceive

The least rub in your fortunes, fall away
Like water from ye, never found again,

But where they mean to sink ye."

—Shakespeare.

"And what is friendship but a name,

A charm that lulls to sleep!

A shade that follows wealth or fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep!"

—Goldsmith.

See "*The Hom. Com.*," on Ps. xli.
9.

III. Earnest prayer in suffering.
David prays for—

1. *The defeat of his enemies' plans by the division of their counsels.* "O Lord, divide their tongues." Alexander: "Confound their speech, or make it unintelligible, and, as a necessary consequence, confound their counsels. There is obvious reference to the confusion of tongues at Babel (Gen. xi. 7-9), as a great historical example of the way in which God is accustomed and determined to defeat the purposes of wicked men and execute His own."

2. *The sudden destruction of his enemies.* "Destroy, O Lord." Hengstenberg: "Devour, Lord." The word properly signifies, *swallow up*. "Let death seize upon them, let them go down quick into hell." Conant's translation is more accurate: "Desolations are upon them; they shall go down alive to the under world." There is a reference here to the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. xvi. 33). David prays that a similar destruction may befall his enemies. And the reason upon which his prayer is based is that "wickedness is in their dwellings, among them." Let them perish because of their wickedness.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Be careful in the selection of friends and the formation of friendships.* 2. *Prize true friends.*

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,

Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."—Shakespeare.

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly," &c. 3. *Yet confide not too fully in any human friend; for even the truest may fail us in life's great needs for lack of power to aid, &c.* 4. *God alone is supremely trust-worthy.* He cannot fail either in faithfulness or in power, &c.

A TRIUMPHANT CONFIDENCE.

(Verses 16-23.)

In this portion of the Psalm the poet expresses his assured hope of deliverance from all his enemies and dangers. Consider—

I. The nature of his confidence. "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me," &c.

1. *His confidence was comprehensive.* He trusted that (1) *God would destroy his enemies.* "God shall hear and afflict them." Hengstenberg: "God shall hear and answer them." He would hear the angry voices of the wicked, and in judgment He would give them a sharp answer. "Thou, O God, shalt bring them down to the pit of destruction," &c. "The pit of destruction" is Sheol. The idea is, that God would cut them off even as the Psalmist had already prayed Him to do. (2) *God would save him.* He regards this salvation as including (a) Support and preservation during his trials and dangers. "He shall sustain thee, He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (3) Deliverance from his trials and dangers. "The Lord shall save me . . . He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me." He was quite confident that God would deliver him in safety from those who were making war against him. This confidence had brought peace to him in the midst of danger, and he had an assured hope of the restoration of outward peace. This is a confidence which every believer in the Lord may cherish as regards his salvation from inward and from outward enemies. If our trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ our complete triumph and our full salvation are gloriously certain.

2. *His confidence was strong.* There is no trace of hesitation or doubt in the declaration of the Psalmist. He speaks with the clear accent of assured conviction. He is so certain of his deliverance that he speaks of it as already accomplished. "He hath redeemed my soul in peace," &c. He is as sure of

the victory as if it were already won. Such confidence (1) honours God, (2) imparts courage and strength, and (3) insures a rich reward.

3. *His confidence was intelligent.* It was neither ignorant nor presumptuous, but intelligent and reverent. He does not helplessly and unreasonably look to God to save him by miracle; but recognises the fact that salvation is given to us in the use of the means. He mentions as means to his deliverance—(1) *Prayer.* "As for me, I will call upon God," &c. He resolves to pray frequently. "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray." Moll: "The three principal parts of the day, usually observed as the special times of prayer among the Orientals. Or it may, perhaps, be a practical expression for the whole day, equivalent to, at all times, without ceasing." He resolves to pray fervently. "I will pray and cry aloud." Hengstenberg: "I will meditate and cry aloud." Conant: "I will lament and sigh." Moll: "Complain and groan." The idea seems to be that his feelings were deep and strong, and that he would give to them appropriate expression in prayer to God. Deep emotions cannot be restrained in their utterance within the limits of formal and ordinary expressions. Such were the emotions of the Psalmist. (2) *Trust.* He regarded the continuance of his confidence as essential to his salvation. Hence he exhorts himself—"Cast thy burden upon the Lord;" and he resolves, "I will trust in Thee." The continued exercise of faith is an essential condition of calmness and strength and conquest. And we know from the history that, in grappling with the rebellion of Absalom and the treachery of Ahithophel, David not only prayed and trusted, but planned and laboured also. To faith and prayer he added thought and effort (2 Sam. xv.-xviii.). In all this the poet is an example to us. Our confidence in God

should be intelligent. The faith which is inculcated and encouraged in the Bible, and which God has promised to reward, is sublimely reasonable. It is a discerning, strong, victorious thing. And God has promised to crown the exercise of it with His blessing.

II. The grounds of his confidence. The Psalmist shows to us that his faith was based on—

1. *The number of his enemies.* "For there were many with me." Moll: "The translation of the A. V. '*with me*' is literal, but conveys a wrong meaning. The Heb. preposition, like the English *with*, has a double use, mutual action may be co-operative or antagonistic. Thus we say: fight *with* = against, to be angry *with* = against. The meaning here as determined by the context is clearly *against*." The rebel army that was waging war against David was a numerous one (2 Sam. xv. 12; xvii. 11; xviii. 7). David took encouragement from this fact to expect the interposition of God for his salvation. When our enemies are many and strong, then God will interpose for us, if our cause be righteous, and our trust reposed in Him (2 Kings vi. 13-18; 2 Chron. xx. 12, 23-25).

2. *The character of his enemies.* They were—(1) *Irreligious.* "They fear not God." They lived in open disregard of God. (2) *Persistent in evil.* "They have no changes." The word חֲלִיפֹת, translated "changes," is used in Job x. 17; xiv. 14, in a military sense, signifying discharges, relief-troops. Accordingly Hengstenberg translates: "To whom there is no discharge," and interprets it as signifying "they who incessantly and constantly serve sin and fear not God." Or it may mean that there was no change in their conduct. They were not occasional, but persistent, evil doers. Thus in the latter part of ver. 19 we have a compendium of

ver. 9-11. (3) *Treacherous.* "He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." The use of the singular points to some one who was pre-eminent in treachery, e.g., Abithophel. These verses are a compendium of vers. 12-14. (4) *Cruel.* The Psalmist speaks of them as "bloody and deceitful men." Violent and cruel were they in heart and in action. The wickedness of his enemies is to David a ground of assurance that God will deliver him from their base designs and doings. While God is God He must be hostile to men of such character. He must oppose and thwart their designs. He must deliver His servants from them.

3. *The ancient sovereignty of God.* "He that abideth of old." Hengstenberg: "He who is throned of old." Moll: "He that sitteth on the throne of old." (Comp. Ps. lxxiv. 12; Hab. i. 12.) The deeds by which the Lord had manifested His righteous sovereignty in past ages encouraged the Psalmist to expect His interposition for his deliverance from present perils. M. Henry: "Mortal men, though ever so high and strong, will easily be crushed by an eternal God, and are a very unequal match for Him." Arndt: "It is a great consolation when one is in trouble and persecution to think how God still lives, and has always proved Himself to be a gracious God towards those who fear Him."

Such, then, was the sure basis upon which the triumphant confidence of the distressed and imperilled poet-king rested.

CONCLUSION.—See the conquering power of faith in God, and exercise it. See it in David. In Paul (2 Cor. iv. 8-18). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

MAN'S BURDEN AND SUSTAINER.

Ver. 22. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."

This verse is variously translated. Margin: "Cast thy gift upon the Lord,"

&c. Hengstenberg: "Cast upon the Lord thy salvation, and He shall take care of thee," &c. Gesenius: "Cast upon Jehovah what He hath given (or

laid upon) thee; that is, thy lot." Fuerst: "Leave to God the lot, intrust God with it. According to another meaning of יָבֹא (to give up, to impose) יָבֹא may signify a burden." Moll: "That which is laid upon thee." Co-nant: "Cast thy burden on Jehovah," &c.

I. Man is burdened. This fact is too painfully obvious to require proof. *Physically* many are burdened by severe labours and sufferings. *Mentally* many are burdened by anxieties, perplexities, over-tasked brain, &c. Our *social relations*, which are frequently of much benefit and blessing to us, are seldom free from cares, sorrows, and distresses. Even the *religious life* has its burdens for man. Religion itself is not a burden; but, by becoming religious, a man becomes sensible of burdens that he did not feel before. The mysteries of the Divine administration of human affairs, the imperfection of our individual life, the seeming abortiveness of much of our effort for the good of ourselves and others, seasons of spiritual darkness, &c.—these are burdens. The fact that we are burdened is significant.

1. It indicates that man is not in unison with the Divine order. God did not create man with a load, did not make him to be burdened, &c.

2. It indicates also the greatness of human nature. We feel the burden, we struggle against it, we bear up under it, we strive to be rid of it. In this we have a reminiscence of a free and blessed past, and a pledge of a free and glorious future. Our sense of the burden is an augury of approaching release from it.

II. Man is exhorted to cast his burden upon the Lord. We have a strong tendency to strive to bear our own burden even when we are almost sinking beneath it. In itself this tendency is good. It is the principle of self-reliance leading us to attempt self-help. But this tendency has become corrupted by association with pride and a false independence. Hence, when man is being crushed by it, in imagined self-sufficiency, he refuses to take his burden to the Lord. Spiritual weakness is ever boastful, while spiritual

strength is ever humble. We mistake weakness for strength when we refuse to cast our burden upon the Lord. There are some who do not take their burden to the Lord because their ideas of Him are false, arising from a heart alienated from Him. They say—"God does not care for man; we may suffer, we may perish; but He does not care. He is indifferent, even if He be not cruel to us." Estrangement from God explains this. David exhorts his soul to cast its burden upon the Lord, &c. "The strong part of the soul speaks to the weak." Or he speaks as one of the suffering righteous, and in their name. So let the troubled children of God do now. But how can we cast our burden upon the Lord? By believing prayer. Lay all at the foot of God's throne: tell Him all your troubles, even as a child tells all its sorrows to its mother. You know how the heart is relieved by unfolding its burdens to a dear friend. We can tell *all* to God—nothing is too secret, nothing too sacred.

III. Man is encouraged to cast his burden upon the Lord by the assurance of his support. "He shall sustain thee." How?

1. *By removing the burden.* The poverty that crushes, the mystery that bewilders, the suffering that distresses, in answer to prayer He sometimes removes.

2. *By disclosing the design of the burden.* When we know the reason of our troubles, in many instances their chief painfulness is gone, and we bow reverently to the will of God.

3. *By increasing our strength, so that we shall not be crushed by its load.* This is, perhaps, His most frequent method of relief. This the text distinctly promises, "He shall sustain thee." "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

4. *By unfolding to us a bright future.* The toil and burden will not continue long: then rest and joy, &c.

CONCLUSION.—The character of God, the promises of His Word, and the experience of His people in all ages, unite in encouraging us to trust the assurance, and comply with the precept of the text.

PRECEPT AND PROMISE.

(Verse 22.)

I. The duty enjoined. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." A person's burden is his trouble, his care, or whatever disturbs the peace of his mind. There is no trouble in heaven; there was none in Eden; and believers in Christ will be delivered from trouble when they shall be delivered from sin (Isa. xxxv. 10).

To have a refuge in trouble is a great privilege. . . . God has made Himself to be as a refuge through the mediation of Jesus Christ (John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 18), . . . God is a suitable refuge: He can sustain; He can deliver; He is all-sufficient, &c. . . . By precept, by promise, by the example of others, and the deliverances which they have experienced, we are encouraged to "cast our burden upon the Lord." We should do so—

1. *When oppressed with a sense of sin and guilt.*

2. *In times of temptation.*

3. *In times of trouble.* There are personal troubles, family troubles, troubles from providential changes, e.g., Job's, and troubles from the wickedness of our fellow-men, and the treachery of professed friends.

4. *In seasons of affliction.* "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Go to Him as you would to your best friend, and pour out your wants before Him.

II. The promises with which this precept is enforced.

1. "*He shall sustain thee.*" This implies that, if we make God our refuge, (1) *He will save us from despondency.* He will sustain us with hope. (2) *He will impart to us spiritual strength.* "As thy days so shall thy strength be." (3) *He will overrule all our trials and afflictions for our good.*

2. "*He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*" This promise applies to those who make God their refuge, and in all their trials pursue a course of holy obedience. It implies—(1) *That they shall not be drawn aside by their trials from the path of obedience.* (2) *That they shall not be moved from the source of their comfort.* (3) Some read the words, they shall not be moved for ever, implying that they shall not be utterly cast down.

APPLICATION.—1. *Learn the importance of faith in the Divine promises.* 2. *In making God our refuge in our troubles we must be in the path of duty.* 3. *The miserable condition of those who have not God for their refuge.* 4. *The privilege of having God for our refuge shows the value and the importance of religion.* 5. *How awful will be the end of those who never make God their refuge!*
 —*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

PSALM LVI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician upon Jonath-El-em-Rechokim." The phrase "*Jonath-El-em-Rechokim*" occurs nowhere else in the Bible; and Biblical critics are by no means agreed as to its meaning. Gesenius renders it, "The silent dove among strangers." W. A. Wright, in *Smith's Dict. of the Bible*: "A dumb dove of (in) distant places." De Wette, "Dove of the distant terebinths." Aben Ezra regards it as merely indicating the modulation or the rhythm of the Psalm,—*"after the melody of the air which begins Jonath-El-em-Rechokim."* Fuerst regards it as referring to "an old poem, after which the 56th Psalm was sung." "In the *Biour* to Mendelssohn's version of the Psalms, *Jonath-El-em-Rechokim* is mentioned as a musical instrument which produced dull, mournful sounds." Hengstenberg, Alexander, et al., interpret the phrase as describing the unhappy condition of David during his exile from the land of Israel, as an innocent and uncomplaining sufferer among strangers. "*Michtam of David.*" Margin: "A golden Psalm of David," which is interpreted as signifying that "the

Psalm was to David precious as fine gold." Luther: "A golden jewel." Gesenius, De Wette, *et al.*: "Writing." Hengstenberg: "A secret of David." He explains it as "a song with a deep import." W. A. Wright in Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, says,—“Beyond the general probability that it is a musical term, the origin of which is uncertain and the application lost, nothing is known.”

The superscription also gives us the occasion of the composition of the Psalm. "When the Philistines took him in Gath." The history is contained in 1 Sam. xxi. 10, *seq.* Ps. xxxiv. refers to the same occasion.

The leading idea of the Psalm is that of *confidence in God in time of danger*, which finds expression in the refrain, vers. 4 and 10, 11.

THE GODLY MAN AND HIS ENEMIES.

(Verses 1-7.)

These verses may suitably be regarded as illustrating the life of a good man in this world in relation to his enemies. Consider—

I. The enemies of the godly man. They are here represented as—

1. *Eager.* This seems to be the idea of the clause which is incorrectly rendered, "man would swallow me up." Moll renders it: "Mortal man snorts against me." Hengstenberg: "Man snuffs after me." The meaning is either that his enemies panted after him as animals greedy of their prey, or snorted against him as animals enraged. The foes of the Psalmist were hot and eager in their hostility against him. The enemies of the godly now are active and zealous. Satan and his numerous allies amongst men display an earnestness and enthusiasm worthy of a good cause.

2. *Numerous.* "They be many that fight against me." David had many enemies—Saul and his followers, and Achish, the king of Gath, and his servants. The godly soul has many foes,—the world, the flesh, and the devil—enemies within his own breast, and enemies without, in society, &c.

3. *Constant.* "Mine enemies would daily," &c. "Every day they wrest," &c. The enemies of the Poet were incessant in their efforts to effect his overthrow. Every day their hostility was renewed. The enemies of the godly manifest great unweariedness of effort. Evil never rests. Its dread activities are untiring.

4. *Dishonest.* "They wrest my words." They twisted, perverted, tortured his words, so as to get from them

a meaning which he never intended, and by which they might injure him. Good men are exposed to the misrepresentations and slanders of their foes.

5. *Confederate.* "They gather themselves together." The enemies of David combined against him. It seems sometimes in the history of the godly soul as though the forces of evil were united against it. All evil is one in this, that it is directed against God and the interests of His kingdom and people.

6. *Secret.* "They hide themselves," &c. They were like foes lying in ambush. The designs of evil are crafty and cunning. The people of God have to guard "against the wiles of the devil." "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." Hence the peril, and the necessity for watchfulness.

7. *Cruel.* "They wait for my soul." The enemies of David sought to take his life. Our spiritual enemies seek not to deprive us of physical life, but to ensnare and ruin our soul. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

(*α.*) *How foolish it is to make light of our spiritual enemies! and it may be ruinous!* (Eph. vi. 12).

(*β.*) *How great is the importance of guardedness of spirit!* (Eph. vi. 13-18).

(*γ.*) *How needful is the Divine protection!* (Ps. cxxv. 2).

II. The prayer of the godly man in the midst of his enemies. This contains—

1. *A comprehensive petition.* "Be merciful unto me, O God." If the Psalmist secured the exercise of the Divine mercy on his behalf, he would

need nothing more. The active exercise of the mercy of God toward us is a guarantee of all needful good,—protection, guidance, support, ultimate victory.

2. *A powerful plea* is implied in this petition. In asking for mercy the Psalmist renounces all idea of merit in himself, and looks to the riches of Divine grace as the source and the reason of blessing. We do well to plead the unspeakable generosity of the Divine disposition. "He delighteth in mercy."

3. *An earnest appeal to the Divine justice.* "Shall they escape by iniquity?" &c. We have here—(1) An expectation involving extreme wickedness. The enemies of the Psalmist were so depraved that they cherished the hope that they should escape the just consequences of their transgressions by their own cunning and violence, lawlessness, and treachery. (2) An assurance of the rectitude of the Divine government. The inquiry of the Psalmist implies his firm belief that his foes would not escape the Divine judgment by their wickedness. "The sin of sinners will never be their security." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." (3) A desire for the exercise of the Divine judgment. "In anger cast down the people, O God." David prays that God in judgment would defeat the plans and destroy the power of his enemies, who wickedly sought his life. We do well to pray for the overthrow of evil and the exercise of the righteous judgment of God.

III. The confidence of the godly man in the midst of his enemies.

1. *It was reposed in the grandest object.* "In God I have put my trust." Ps. xxxii. 10; xxxvii. 39, 40; cxxv. 1; Isa. xxvi. 3, 4; Jer. xvii. 7, 8.

2. *It was exercised in the most trying season.* "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." Calvin: "It seems, indeed, as if *fear* and *hope* were feelings too contrary the one to the other to dwell in the same heart; but experience shows that hope there in fact really reigns where some portion of the heart is possessed by fear. For when the mind is calm and tranquil, hope is not exercised, yea rather is, as it were, hushed to sleep; but then, and not till then does she put forth all her strength, when the mind has been cast down by cares and she lifts it up, when it has been saddened and disturbed and she calms it, when it has been smitten with fear and she sustains and props it."

3. *It produced the sublimest results.* (1) It raised him above the fear of man. "I will not fear; what can flesh do unto me?" Arnd: "He sets against each other the mighty God, and impotent flesh, which is as grass and as the flower of the field." (2) It inspired him with the praise of God. "In God I will praise His word." The Psalmist extols God because of His gracious word and its precious promises. Thus by faith the godly man may triumph in the midst of his enemies, and is sure of complete victory over them ultimately.

TIMES OF FEAR, AND TRUST IN GOD.

(Verse 3.)

Consider,—

I. What is implied and included in trusting in God.

1. *A knowledge of God as accessible through a Mediator.* We have sinned, and there is only one way in which the guilty can approach the Most High, and their prayer can be accepted by Him. The blood of the great sacrifice is the medium, and faith in Christ is the only method (John xiv. 6).

2. *A full surrender of the soul to God*

to be governed by His holy laws. God claims the first place in our heart. His requirements are binding, and His authority must be regarded. It is vain to say we are trusting in God if we refuse subjection to His rightful dominion.

3. *Acquiescence in the arrangements of providence, and submission to His will.* Habitual discontent and murmuring is incompatible with a life of confidence in God. Losses, afflictions,

and bereavements are painful, but confidence in God will lead us to bear them with submission, and to say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

II. The circumstances in which this confidence is most needful and important. "What time I am afraid," &c. There are seasons in which fear will be awakened; in such seasons we should trust in God. Fear may be excited—

1. *By a sense of guilt.* When the sinner is convinced of the evil and danger of sin he feels himself under the curse of a broken law, and in danger of everlasting misery. A sense of guilt may be experienced after conversion. When the conscience is wounded by remorse nothing can give it rest but the application of the blood of Christ, and the enjoyment of the mercy of God. "What time I am afraid," &c.

2. *In seasons of temptation.* The believer may be walking in darkness, and may have no light, he may be lamenting the hardness and carnality of his own heart, he may be fearing apostasy, &c. In such seasons our best refuge is God.

3. *In seasons of domestic trials.* Troubles to parents through the perverseness of children, as Jacob and David had. Or trials by reason of affliction.

4. *Under bereaving providences.* These are some of the heaviest trials which are experienced. Unless we go to the right refuge we shall be in danger of sinking into darkness.

5. *Under personal afflictions.* To the people of God these are not judgments, but fatherly chastisements. The hand that wounds can heal, &c.

6. *In the prospect of death.* Death is an event the most serious and important, and the prospect of it has a tendency to awaken fear. But "What time," &c.

III. The advantages which attend a life of confidence in God.

1. *It will be an evidence of religion.*

2. *It will bring with it peace and satisfaction.*

3. *It will lead to support under the trials of life.* "My grace is sufficient for thee," &c.

4. *It will lead to deliverance from troubles.* Through all his troubles the believer shall be brought in safety, and he shall stand and look back upon life and view them all left behind him for ever.

5. *It will lead us to account all our troubles as blessings.*

"E'en crosses from His sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise."

"All things work together for good," &c.

6. *It will lead to an eternity of happiness.* "There remaineth a rest for the people of God."

CONCLUSION.—Learn the importance of trusting in God. It is essential to our salvation.—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

THE REJOICING EXILE.

(Verses 8-13.)

In these verses David, an exile and wanderer, bitterly persecuted, appears as glad and triumphant by faith in God. He rejoices—

I. In the minuteness of the Divine knowledge and the tenderness of the Divine regard.

1. *The perfection of the Divine knowledge.* "Thou tellest" (or numberest) "my wanderings." David was at this time an exile and wanderer, fleeing from place to place because of the cease-

less and malicious persecutions of Saul. Barnes (*in loco*) cites eight of these wanderings; Rudinger counts fourteen. All of them were counted by God. Not one was omitted. Nor would any one of them be forgotten; for like his tears, they were recorded in His book, Mal. iii. 16.

2. *The tenderness of the Divine regard.* "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." The persecutions which drove David into exile and wandering caused

him to weep, but he was comforted by the thought that God cared for him as a friend who would gather and preserve his tears. "It seems probable that there is an allusion here to the custom of collecting tears shed in a time of calamity and sorrow, and preserving them in a small bottle or *lachrymatory*, as a memorial of the grief. The Romans had a custom, that in a time of mourning—on a funeral occasion—a friend went to one in sorrow, and wiped away the tears from the eyes with a piece of cloth, and squeezed the tears into a small bottle, which was carefully preserved as a memorial of friendship and sorrow." Perowne: "He knows that each day of his wandering, each nook in which he found shelter, each step that he had taken, every artifice by which he had baffled his foes,—all have been numbered by his Heavenly Keeper, Yea, no tear that he has shed, when his eye has been raised to heaven in prayer, has fallen to the ground. God he prays to gather them all in His bottle, and trusts that He will note them in His book." This confidence strengthened, cheered, rejoiced the Poet. So also Job: "But He knoweth the way that I take," &c. To the sincere believer in God there is a rich fund of consolation and encouragement in the Divine knowledge of us and regard for us.

II. In his assurance of deliverance from his enemies. "When I cry, then shall mine enemies turn back," &c.

1. *The condition of deliverance.* "When I cry." Believing prayer is a condition of the Divine interposition for us. "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

2. *The promptitude of deliverance.* "When I cry, then shall," &c. "It shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Comp. Dan. ix. 20-23.) Spurgeon: "What irresistible artillery is this which wins the battle as soon as its report is heard!"

3. *The assurance of deliverance.* "This I know." Mark (1) the *strength* of this assurance. He does not speak with a perhaps or a peradventure, but confi-

dently says, "I know." (2) The *ground* of this assurance, "For God is for me." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do unto me?"

III. In his triumphant confidence in God. "In God will I praise His word," &c. (vers. 10, 11). See our notes on ver. 4.

IV. In his delightful obligations to God. "Thy vows are upon me, O God," &c. (vers. 12, 13). It is worthy of distinct and careful observation that to the Psalmist obligation to God was a privilege and pleasure—a thing to be celebrated in glad song.

1. *The nature of this obligation.* "Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render praises unto Thee." Hengstenberg: "The vows consist of offerings. To the kind, the vows, the Psalmist, however, adds the species, thank-offerings." David had vowed thank-offerings to God, and he looks forward with pleasure to the fulfilment of his vows. Tholuck: "David thinks of songs of praise whilst he still sings lamentations, of vows of thanksgiving whilst yet praying."

2. *The reason of this obligation.* (1) What God had done for him. "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death." The Lord had delivered the Psalmist from imminent danger and from death again and again. The shield of the Almighty Protector had covered him, and the deadly darts of his enemies were unable to injure him. (2) What God would yet do for him. "Wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling?" The Psalmist was confident that God would continue to defend and sustain him. What He has done may be safely taken as an assurance of what He will do. (3) The design of God's doings for him. "That I may walk before God in the light of the living." "The light of life" is in contrast with the darkness of the realm of death. To walk before the face of God is to live in the enjoyment of His favour and protection. For these reasons David felt under binding and blessed obligations to praise God. And

by all these things his heart was gladdened though his outward circumstances were so depressing and painful.

APPLICATION.—If our trust is reposed in God we may and ought to apply this exposition to ourselves. Let us be strengthened and encouraged, however many and sore our trials, because—1. *God's knowledge of us is*

minute and perfect. 2. *His regard for us is tender and unceasing.* 3. *He has assured us of final and full salvation.* 4. *His past deliverances also warrant our present confidence.* 5. *Faith in Him should enable us to triumph even in the most trying circumstances* (Rom. v. 3-5; viii. 31-39).

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD A COMFORT TO HIS PEOPLE.

(Verse 8.)

The Psalmist refers to his removals from place to place for safety—"Thou tellest my wanderings." He desired that God would pity him under his sorrows—"Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle." An allusion here to a custom of the ancients.

I. That the pilgrimage of the righteous and the changes of life are numbered and written in the book of God's remembrance. "Thou tellest my wanderings," &c.

1. *The life of the righteous is a spiritual pilgrimage.* It begins at conversion; it has its "wanderings;" some of them sinful; all of them known to God.

2. *The changes in the life of the righteous are numbered by the Lord, and are in the book of His remembrance.* (1) Many pass through changes in the place of their residence. They are led in a way that they know not and in paths that they have not known. The Lord telleth all these wanderings. (2) Many are the changes of circumstances; e.g., Job; David from his wanderings to the throne.

II. The sorrows of the righteous are known to God, and David desired Him to keep them in His mind. "Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle," &c.

1. The tears of *penitents* are put into His bottle. God looks with compassion upon the wanderer returning home, &c.

2. The tears of the *righteous shed over the remains of sin.*

3. The tears of the *righteous in their spiritual conflicts*, occasioned by sinful dispositions, hardness of heart, &c.

4. The tears caused by the trials of

life. "Like as a father pitieth his children," &c. All the afflictions and sorrows of life are known unto God. "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

III. God's knowledge of His people is a source of comfort to them.

1. *That He knows the course they take in their sorrows is a comfort to them* (Job xxiii. 10). This comfort may be taken (1) By the penitent at the foot of the cross. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," &c. (2) By the Christian whose daily prayer is that he may be found in Christ. (3) By the believer seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit in the conflicts of life. (4) And by the godly in all the changes and trials of their pilgrimage.

2. *Their views of God afford them consolation in their sorrows.* (1) The Lord is their God, their Father, and their friend. (2) The conduct of God is governed by infinite wisdom and goodness. (3) Many trials come from the hand of God. "The Lord trieth the righteous." (4) The purposes of God afford his people comfort. The discipline may be painful, but its design is their perfection. (5) They have access to the throne of grace in all their sorrows. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry." (6) The promises of God inspire them with confidence and hope (2 Pet. i. 4; 2 Cor. i. 20; Isa. xxxv. 10).

LEARN IN CONCLUSION.—1. *That sorrows are a part of our present portion.* "In the world ye have tribulation." 2. *All our sorrows are known*

unto God. 3. *In all our sorrows we should trust in God* (Nah. i. 7). 4. *We should keep on such terms with God as will enable us to derive comfort from His infinite knowledge.* 5. *If God manifests*

such regard to His people in the changing scenes of life, how important is it to enjoy the privilege! and to enjoy it we must be the subjects of true religion.—Abridged from an unpublished MS.

THE STATE OF THE GODLY IN THIS WORLD.

(Verse 13.)

We shall regard these words of the Psalmist's as setting forth the present state of Christian believers. It is—

I. A Divinely delivered state. "Thou hast delivered my soul from death." The unrenewed soul is spiritually dead (Eph. ii. 1-5; iv. 18). Man is delivered from death—1. *Through the mediation of Jesus.* 2. *By the instrumentality of redemptive truth.* 3. *By the agency of the Holy Spirit.* 4. *On condition of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ* (John iii. 36; v. 24).

II. A Divinely sustained state. "Wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling?" Notice: 1. *The danger implied.* The renewed soul is in danger of falling. Three things show this—(1) The fact of temptation. (2) Our sus-

ceptibility to temptation. (3) Some of the best men have fallen. 2. *The confidence involved.* That God is "able to keep us from falling" (Jude 24). 3. *The encouragement afforded.* "Thou hast delivered. . . . Wilt Thou not," &c. What He has done is an earnest of what He will yet do (Phil. i. 6).

III. A Divinely approved state. "That I may walk before God in the light of the living." This includes—1. *Life governed by God.* Living as in His sight. His will our rule of action. 2. *Life well-pleasing to God.* "To walk before the face of God" is to live in the enjoyment of His favour (Ps. iv. 6; xxi. 6; lxxxix. 15). Such a life naturally tends to fulness of joy in His immediate presence (Ps. xvi. 11).

PSALM LVII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." The chief musician was the director of the music in public worship. And the Psalms which were addressed to him were intended for use in the Temple services. "*Al-taschith*" = "destroy not." According to some expositors, the expression denotes the melody to which the Psalm was to be sung. The Psalm was to be sung to the same tune as the song known as, "Destroy not." According to others it is a musical expression, probably denoting the key in which the Psalm was to be sung. And, "according to others, it must be a maxim, which the Psalmist at that time continually revolved in his heart, and must indicate the quintessence of the Psalm." "*Michtam of David.*" See Introduction to Ps. lvi. "*When he fled from Saul in the cave.*" Moll: "We cannot decide whether the cave is the one mentioned in 1 Sam. xxi. as the cave of Adullam, or that situated by the sheepcotes upon the Alpine heights of Engedi (1 Sam. xxiv.). These caves are numerous in the limestone and chalk mountains, and are often of great extent, and are still the hiding-places of fugitives."

A SAFE REFUGE IN SORE PERIL.

(Verses 1-6.)

Let us consider—

I. The extreme perils in a good man's life. David mentions three things as causes of danger and trial to him at this time

1. *The bitter reproaches of his enemies.* "The reproach of him that would swallow me up." The rendering of Hengstenberg and Moll presents what we regard as the true idea of this clause.

"He reproaches that snuffs after me."
 "He reproacheth who snorts at me."
 It is not that God would reproach the enemies, but that the enemies reproached the Psalmist. Calumny and slander were freely plied by Saul and his party at this time against David.

2. *The fierce cruelty of his enemies.*
 "My soul is among lions," &c. "The enemies are lions, greedy of their prey, but the teeth of these men-lions are spears and arrows, and the tongues of these men-lions are a sharp sword. As the lion uses his teeth and tongue, these children of men use their spears, arrows, and swords to destroy their prey, having the same greedy, lickerish natures as the wild beasts."—(C. A. Briggs.) Their eagerness for the destruction of the Poet is brought into prominence. They snorted at him as enraged wild beasts, or as wild beasts greedy for their prey. We know how eagerly and ferociously Saul and his companions at this time sought to kill David.

3. *The subtle schemes of his enemies.*
 "They have prepared a net for my steps," &c. Not content with open and fierce pursuit, they concocted deep plans, hoping, by means of them, to ensnare the Poet. They used fraud as well as force against him. They left no means unemployed by which they thought they might effect his overthrow. Such were the trials from which the Psalmist was suffering, and the perils to which he was exposed. The enemies had so far succeeded that, in some measure, the spirit of the Psalmist drooped. "They have bowed down my soul." He was not insensible to trial. He felt the pressure of their persecutions. He was aware of the dangers with which they surrounded him.

II. *The secure refuge from the perils of a good man's life.* "In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge." The figure is very beautiful and expressive. Perowne: "This exceedingly striking image may have been suggested by Dent. xxxii. 11. (See Ps. xvii. 8.) Still more tender is the New Testament figure (Matt. xxiii. 37). Perhaps there is nothing more remarkable in the Psalms than this ever-recur-

ring expression of a tender personal affection on the part of the sacred poets to God. There is no parallel to this in the whole range of heathen literature." Delitzsch: "The soft shading of God's wings is the protection of His soft, sweet love, and the shadow of His wings is the refreshing, trusting comfort connected with this protection. In this shadow the Poet takes his refuge until the ruinous danger which threatens him passes by." The image is suggestive of *affection, rest, shade, safety*. The Psalmist indicates—

1. *The ground of his trust in God.*

(1) *His supremacy.* "I will cry unto God Most High." However great the power and the multitude of our enemies, they cannot injure us if we have made the Most High our Refuge. "Now that he takes in view the Most High, the giants of the earth become changed into pitiful dwarfs." Franke: "When it is clearly manifested to the heart of man that God is the Most High, he fears nothing, not even the devil and his hosts of hell, but is confident and unterrified." (2) *His continuous activity on his behalf.* "God that performeth all things for me." Or, "God who accomplisheth for me." "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." "He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Hengstenberg: "With God the beginning furnishes a pledge for the finishing, the word for the deed." (3) *His kindness toward him.* "God shall send forth His mercy." David confided in the infinite and free favour of God. (4) *His fidelity.* "And His truth." The Psalmist had an unshaken reliance on the faithfulness of God. He knew that He would fulfil His promises, and save those who trusted in Him. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." Surely here we have most firm and ample ground for trusting in God. He in whom all these perfections inhere must be worthy of the fullest confidence as a secure Refuge in the trials of life.

2. *The expression of his trust in God.*
 "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me. . . . I will cry unto

God Most High." The trust expresses itself here in prayer, Calvin: "He makes the *calling upon* to follow the *confiding*, for it cannot fail, but that those who trust in God should direct their prayer to Him." In this brief prayer there are three points worthy of notice. (1) *It reveals a just estimate of the poet's own moral condition.* He pleads no merit of his own; he does not urge his innocence, but asks for mercy. (2) *It honours God.* By appealing to the Divine mercy, David manifests an exalted estimate of the kindness and faithfulness of God;—he honours Him by his faith, &c. (3) *It is fervent.* The urgency of need and desire is indicated by the repetition of the cry.

3. *The greatness of his trust in God.* This is seen—(1) *In his sense of his own perfect security.* "I lie among them that are set on fire," &c. In the midst of his enemies he lay down to rest calmly as on a soft couch in perfect safety. Moll: "It expresses not a complaint of his dangerous situation, but the resolution of trust in God, with which he will lie down to sleep in the midst of dangerous circumstances." Faith is triumphant over fear. (2) *In his supreme desire for the universal honour of God.* "Be Thou exalted, O

God, above the heavens, Thy glory above all the earth." The grand wish of the Psalmist, to which all other feelings were subordinated, was that God might be supremely and universally glorified. The Psalmist loses sight of his own peril, or rises quite superior to it, in his fervent desire for the exaltation of God. (3) *In his assurance that the wicked designs and doings of his enemies would issue in their own ruin.* "They have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves." "In the cave, when Saul thought David should fall into his hands, he fell into the hands of David, and lay at his mercy." "God beats the enemies of His servants with their own weapons." (See "*The Hom. Com.*" on Ps. vii. 14–16.)

CONCLUSION.—The application is obvious. 1. *To all, life is more or less a scene of trial.* 2. *Trial involves danger.* 3. *In trial, every man needs a refuge.* 4. *Various are the refuges resorted to by men in trial.* 5. *Only one Refuge is adequate and trustworthy.* 6. *To that One all may have access.* 7. "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him; God is a Refuge for us."

A LIFE OF CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

(Verse 1.)

Consider—

I. The grounds on which a life of confidence in God is encouraged. His holy Word affords the greatest encouragement unto His people to put their trust in Him. The whole life of a believer consists in trusting in God. The very first exercise of religion is an act of confidence in the mercy of God, &c. The believer may take encouragement to trust in God, from—

1. *The relation which the Divine Being sustains to him.* He is his Father. "Like as a father pitieth," &c. A child trusts, &c. He is his God. All His Divine perfections are engaged on behalf of His people.

2. *The efficiency of the mediation of*

Jesus Christ. The atonement for sin which He has made, and the intercession which He offers on our behalf are perfect, and should encourage our trust (Heb. iv. 14–16).

3. *The promises of God.* These are suited to all our circumstances, &c.

4. *The deliverances which He has wrought for His people.*

II. The nature of trust in God, and the circumstances in which we should trust Him.

1. *The nature of trust in God.* It consists in relying upon the declarations and promises of God, in believing the truth of God, and in acting accordingly. (1.) Trust in God can be exercised only in connection with a proper regard to

the precepts of His Word ; without this, reliance upon His promises would be presumption, not the confidence of faith. (2) To rely upon the Divine promises whilst regarding the Divine precepts is the proper exercise of confidence in God.

2. *The circumstances in which we should trust in God.* We should trust in Him at all times and in all circumstances, but especially—(1) When oppressed with guilt. (2) In seasons of temptation. (3) In seasons of persecution (2 Tim. iii. 12.) (4) Under all the trials of life (Ps. l. 15).

III. *The advantages of a life of confidence in God.* Trust in God is a duty enjoined by many precepts, and enforced by many examples. It is also a privilege of the greatest value (Ps.

cxlvi. 5.) A life of confidence in God will be attended with—

1. *Peace* (Isa. xxvi. 3).

2. *Security.* The arm of Omnipotence is engaged for the defence of those who trust in God.

3. *Support under trial.*

4. *Deliverance from troubles.*

5. *The sanctification of trials to our good.*

CONCLUSION.—1. *It is manifestly our wisdom to trust in God.* 2. *A life of confidence in God is one of the best evidences of true religion.* If we would know whether we are the subjects of religion, let us inquire whither we go for refuge, &c. 3. *The believer has the prospect of everlasting rest in God, &c.* “There remaineth a rest for the people of God.”—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD A MOTIVE TO PRAYER.

(Verse 2.)

The Psalmist felt himself and all his affairs in the hands of Providence. He knew that God performed all things for him. From this view of providence he took encouragement to make Him his refuge. “I will cry unto God,” &c. These words suggest the interesting and important truth that *the providence of God presents us with a powerful motive to prayer.*

I. *Endeavour to illustrate this truth.*

1. *The providence of God is closely connected with His existence.* If we believe in His existence we cannot consistently deny His providence.

2. *The Sacred Volume teaches the doctrine—*(1) It represents all the affairs of the universe as under the government of God (Ps. xxxi. 15, ciii. 19; *et al*). (2) Its precepts which enforce the duty of putting our trust in Him imply that His providence is universal, and extends to all our concerns (Prov. iii. 5, 6; Matt. vi. 31–34; *et al*). (3) The history of the Church and of individual believers, which it records, testifies to the exercise of the Divine providence—Jewish Church, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Daniel.

3. *The conduct of providence is governed by the infinite perfections of God.* Wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, power.

4. *We are at all times, and under all circumstances, under the care of the Divine providence.* In infancy, youth, &c. In prosperity, adversity, &c.

5. *It is important to realise the universality of the Divine providence.* Such realisation will lead us to commit our ways unto Him, will afford peace, &c.

II. *The circumstances in which it is important to realise this truth, and to make God a refuge by prayer.* It is important to realise it continually; but especially—

1. *In difficulties.* These arise from various causes.

2. *In troubles from enemies.* David at this time.

3. *In painful trials.*

4. *Prayer ought to be esteemed a privilege.*

III. *The advantages of a life of faith and prayer are many and great.*

1. *We realise that some wise end is to be answered by trials.*

2. *Our trials are accounted as for our good.*

3. *Support under trial and deliverance from it are granted in answer to prayer.*

4. *A review of the conduct of providence may be profitable under peculiar trials.* David found it so. Every man may study Divine providence to his profit.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Bring all troubles to the throne of grace.* 2. *Every deliverance in answer to prayer should be acknowledged by praise.* 3. *Past providences afford encouragement to trust God for the future.* 4. *The mysteries of providence will be explained in a better state.*—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

EXEMPLARY PRAISE.

(Verses 7-11.)

The Psalmist's praise of God expressed in these verses is worthy of imitation in each and all of its main features.

I. In its Theme. "I will sing and give praise. For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds." Mercy and truth are the Divine perfections which are most prominent in God's covenant relations with His people. His mercy is the source of all blessings to sinful men. And His truth is an assurance that He will fulfil His word, that He will perform His promises. The poet represents these perfections as *infinite*. Such is the meaning of the figures which he employs. "Great unto the heavens," &c. From the infinity of God's mercy and truth we infer—

1. *That the blessings which flow from them reach unto all men.*

2. *That they are worthy of the unre-served confidence of all men.*

II. In the spirit of its Offerer. The poet manifests—

1. *Strong confidence in God.* "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." Perowne: "My heart is steadfast." Moll: "My heart is confident." His confidence in God was firm and abiding. It enabled him to rise above all fear of danger.

2. *Fervent gratitude and reverent admiration towards God.* "I will sing and give praise." His confidence was religious. He was sensible of his obligations to God, and gratefully praised Him. He recognised the perfections of God, and reverently adored Him. This is the true spirit in which praise should be offered to the Most High.

III. In its enthusiasm. This is clearly seen in his resolution to praise God—

1. *With the noblest powers of his being.* "Awake up, my glory." His "glory" is his soul, with all its wondrous faculties and capacities, as created in the image of God. David summons his noblest powers to the worship of God. Soulless praise is worthless, and even offensive in the sight of God.

2. *With choice instrumental accompaniment.* "Awake, psaltery and harp." David would use the sweetest and most musical aids in this hallowed exercise. He seeks to give worthy expression to the feelings of his soul in praise of so glorious a Being.

3. *With affectionate zeal.* "I myself will awake early." More correctly: "I will awake the morning-dawn." He resolves to anticipate the morning-dawn with his songs of praise, so great were his zeal and love for the hallowed exercise. To him the praise of God was the purest pleasure. Surely this enthusiasm in the worship of God is worthy the imitation of all.

IV. In its sphere. "I will praise Thee, O Lord, among the people; I will sing unto Thee among the nations." He would celebrate the praise of God to the widest possible extent. Delitzsch: "His song of praise is not to sound in a narrow space where it can scarcely be heard; he will appear, as an evangelist of his deliverance and his Deliverer, among the nations of the world; his calling extends beyond Israel; the experiences of his person are for the benefit of humanity." The praise of

God should be universal, as "His mercy and truth" are.

V. In the sense of its imperfection. The Psalmist was conscious that his song fell far below the merit and glory of his theme; and he, therefore, prays, "Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, Thy glory above all the earth." Our most reverent and most enthusiastic praise is inadequate to so sublime and glorious a theme.

"Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought."

—Newton.

DECIDED PIETY.

(Verse 7.)

Consider—

I. The properties of a pious or godly life.

1. *True piety has its seat in the heart.*
"My heart is fixed."

2. *True piety springs from just views of truth.* The heart will not be fixed until the great facts which lie at the foundation of religion are known, &c.

3. *Decided piety may be traced to just views of redemption and the greatness of its blessings.*

4. *Relief from the burden of guilt, through the great sacrifice for sin, tends to fix the heart, &c.*

5. *Piety is strengthened by religious exercises.*

6. *Divine deliverances strengthen piety.* Answers to prayer promote firmness of purpose to trust in God.

7. *Progress in religion strengthens piety.*

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let us "not make that narrow which God's love has made wide—wide as the heavens"* (ver. 10).
2. Let us, like the Psalmist, *anticipate the promised deliverances of God with our praises.* 3. Let us *strive to make our praise of God commensurate with His mercy and truth.* In this we shall never succeed; yet the effort will be *pleasing to Him and beneficial to us.* "The glory of the Lord should be praised early and late, near and far, in heaven and on earth," and yet it would immeasurably surpass our praise.

II. The advantages of a life of decided piety. Decided piety—

1. *Is attended with security.* Religious principles in the heart are a safeguard, &c.

2. *Recommends religion* (Matt. v. 16).

3. *Is attended with happiness.* Deliverance from guilt, fear, &c. Experience of the joy of salvation, &c.

4. *Inspires confidence in God.*

5. *Strengthens hope in God.*

6. *Inspires praise to God.* "I will sing and give praise."

CONCLUSION.—*Learn*—1. *The importance of the heart being right with God.*

2. *The importance of a correct acquaintance with the principles of religion.* 3. *The importance of religious decision.*

Indecision is dangerous (Matt. 12. 30).—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

PSALM LVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician, Al-taschith." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "*Michtam of David.*" See Introduction to Ps. lvi. Moll: "This complaint respecting domestic administrations of justice gushes forth from the Psalmist in a threatening language, which is almost obscure owing to bold and mingled figures of speech. It is like a torrent which plunges over every hindrance, foaming and raging. We may certainly credit this original poet with a richness of figures and changes in their use, as well as in the turns of language and of thought, in accordance with particular circumstances and feeling. Yet we lack sufficient evidence to show whether the composition occurred in the time of Saul, who was at the same time David's judge and persecutor, who endeavoured to hide the persecution under the appearance of a right-

eous judgment; or in the time of Absalom, who made the administration of justice a means of stealing from David the hearts of the people, whilst he pretended to be impartial."

It seems to us probable that this Psalm, like Psalms lvi., lvii., and lix., relates to the Sauline persecutions. The similarity in the superscriptions and the character of the contents support this view.

THE HISTORY OF HUMAN WICKEDNESS.

In dealing with these wicked judges, whom he addresses in the early portion of the Psalm, David gives us a general description of the origin, progress, and destiny of human wickedness.

I. Wickedness in its root. "The wicked are estranged from the womb," &c. An innate estrangement of the heart from God is the root from which the wickedness of men springs. The doctrine of original sin rests on an awful fact. Moral qualities are transmissible. We enter upon life with tendencies to evil. In some natures these tendencies are terrible in their activity and strength. In this light David regards his enemies. "The most lovely infant that is ushered into being," says Dr. Cumming, "has within it by nature the germs of those elements which feed the flames of hell, and leaven its forlorn inmates with their direst misery. It has in its own heart the embryo of that Upas tree, which distils upon humanity on earth, and on humanity in hell, its death-drops; and so living are the seeds, and so congenial is the soil, that, unless overborne by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the appliances of the Gospel, they will inevitably spring up and flourish."

II. Wickedness in its manifestation.

1. *In the mal-administration of justice* (vers. 1, 2). The exact meaning of these verses is somewhat obscure. The rendering of the first clause of the first verse in the A. V. is certainly incorrect. Alexander translates: "Are ye, indeed, dumb, when ye should speak righteousness?" Conant: "'Do ye, of a truth, in silence, speak righteousness?' A bitter sarcasm. Is it with silence that ye perform the office of speech, dumb when ye ought to speak, and declare the right?" Perowne, on the latter clause of ver. 2, remarks, "This is said sarcastically. Ye pretend, indeed, to hold the balance of justice, and nicely to weigh out to each his just award, but

violence is the weight with which ye adjust the scales." Moll: "It is very bad when those persons and magistrates, who are appointed to administer justice, instead of pronouncing judgment, are silent, and are dumb to the prayers of their subordinates and the earnest entreaties of their friends, not less than to the demands of the law, honour, and conscience. They then not only misuse the scales of justice intrusted to them in an irresponsible manner, to the injury of their fellow-men, but they are likewise hypocrites and liars, since they violate justice at the very time that they pretend to exercise it, and in this manifest their serpent-like nature." Here, then, are three counts in the indictment against these judges. (1) They were silent when they ought to have declared for righteousness. (2) Their hearts were bent on wickedness. (3) Under the pretence of justice they did evil. Thus in the place of judgment there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there was iniquity.

2. *In falsehood.* "Speaking lies." This is a manifestation of wickedness from which David suffered much, and which, in various forms, has been widely prevalent in the whole history of human wickedness.

3. *In malice.* "Their poison is like the poison of a serpent." Their spirit was malignant, and their utterances were spiteful, cruel, and deadly.

III. Wickedness in its full development. "Like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." It is not the adder which stoppeth the ear, but the wicked. What is already deaf by nature has no need to stop its ear. We may read the clause, "As a deaf adder, he stoppeth his ear." By means of stopping their ears the wicked make themselves like the deaf adder. (On serpent charming, see "The

Land and the Book," by Dr. Thomson, p. 154, and Barnes and Lange, *in loco*.) As there are serpents which cannot be charmed, so there are men who will yield to no good influence. They harden themselves against the grace of God, and close their ears against His Word, and strengthen themselves in wickedness, and so prepare themselves for a terrible and inevitable ruin. It is not simply that the tendency to evil with which they were born has developed itself, but it has developed itself unchecked, and without any obstruction, and the influences which have been brought to bear upon them to lead them to resist that development they have resisted, and the aids which have been offered to them to enable them to do so, they have rejected. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." In this way that which at first was merely a tendency to evil becomes an irresistible despot. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." We see this stopping of the ears and hardening of the heart in the disregard of those who eagerly pursue wickedness—

1. *To the remonstrances and entreaties of men, even of their best friends.*

2. *To the invitations of Divine mercy, and the warnings of Divine judgment.*

3. *To the Divine influence working in and through their own conscience.* All these they disregard. Saul is a conspicuous and terrible example of this. Men wilfully close their eyes against the light, and blindness supervenes; they wilfully stop their ears against Divine voices, and deafness results. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

IV. Wickedness in its consummation. "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth," &c. (vers. 6-9). "There is," says Perowne, "an abrupt change in the image employed. As these men are incorrigible in their wickedness, as they cannot be tamed, the Psalmist prays to God to destroy their power for

mischief; but instead of continuing the figure of the serpent charmer, who robs the serpent of his poison, he suddenly represents them as young lions, whose teeth he would see broken that they may no longer devour." In this portion of the Psalm we see the destination of wickedness.

1. *The power of the wicked shall be destroyed.* "Break their teeth," &c. "The young lions" are not the whelps, but those who are youthful in vigour and strength. God will break the power of wickedness. "The arms of the wicked shall be broken."

2. *The plans of the wicked shall be defeated.* "When he bendeth," &c. The Hebrew here is difficult. Hengstenberg translates: "He takes aim with his arrows, as if they were cut in pieces." Conant: "He will fit his arrows, they shall be as if severed." The idea, doubtless, is, that the arrows of the wicked would be without effect as though they had their points cut off. "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought," &c.

3. *The end of the wicked shall be failure and ruin.* (1) Here are the ideas of *wasting* and *failure* as the end of the wicked. "Let them melt away as waters which run continually. As a snail which melteth," &c. (On the metaphor of the snail, see Tristram's "Natural History of the Bible," p. 295, quoted in Lange.) Wickedness tends to failure. Sin is truly a missing of the mark. The life of the wicked shall pass away like an abortion (Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36). (2). Here is the idea of *ruin* as the end of the wicked. "Before your pots," &c. Another difficult verse. A more correct translation would be, "Before your pots feel the thorn, whether fresh or burning; He will sweep it away as with a tempest." "Whether fresh or burning" we take as applying to the thorns. Perowne: "The general sense of this difficult verse seems to be this: As a sudden whirlwind in the desert sweeps away the thorns which have been gathered for cooking almost as soon as they have been set on fire, and before the cauldron has grown hot, so shall the wicked, and all their yet

incomplete designs, be swept away by the wrath of God." The ruin of the wicked is here represented as (a) *sudden* (1 Thess. v. 3). (β) *Irresistible*, "as with a whirlwind" (Prov. xiv. 32). Such is the dread consummation to which wickedness tends.

V. Wickedness as viewed in its ultimate aspects. The consummation of wickedness affords—

1. *Satisfaction to the righteous.* "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance," &c. Alexander: "To bathe his steps in the blood of others is to walk where their blood is flowing, to tread the battlefield where they have fallen, to gain a sanguinary triumph over them, or rather, to partake in the triumph of another." The righteous rejoice that wickedness does not triumph, but is defeated, destroyed. "The Lord reigneth."

2. *Conviction to men in general.* "And men will say, Verily, there is fruit for the righteous," &c. When the ultimate aspects of wickedness are seen men will

be convinced that the moral government of the world is in the hands of a righteous God. Even in the present state of affairs events are frequently conducted to such issues that men cannot resist the conclusion that "there is a God that judgeth in the earth."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Learn the danger of following the bias of our nature apart from the grace of God.* "When we follow our inborn nature we ruin ourselves and others." 2. *Rejoice that the bias of our nature to evil may be changed.* By the grace of God we may "be renewed in the spirit of our mind," &c. (Eph. iv. 23, 24). 3. *Let those who are pursuing evil turn from it to Jesus Christ and to life ere it reaches its dread consummation* (Isa. lv. 6, 7; Ezek. xxxiii. 11). 4. *Learn to take a comprehensive view of the divine dealings with men.* By so doing we shall be likely correctly to understand the ways of God. 5. *Cultivate a strong and constant faith in the exercise and rectitude of the Divine administration in human affairs.*

PSALM LIX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician, Al-taschith." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "Michtam of David." See Introduction to Ps. lvi. "When Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." The history here referred to is contained in 1 Sam. xix. 11-18. Moll: "The contents and form of this Psalm do not lead us to limit that dangerous situation in Gibeah to the one night before the flight which was rendered possible by Michal. It is particularly the recurring verses (vers. 6, 14), which describe repeated hostile waylaying, which began with the evening."

Both the nature of the contents and the style of the composition of the Psalm confirm the statement of the superscription as to its authorship and occasion.

THE HUNTED LIFE AND ITS DIVINE GUARDIAN.

(Verses 1-10.)

In this, as in several preceding Psalms, complaint, prayer, and confidence are the chief feelings which find expression. Notice—

I. The character and conduct of the persecutors.

1. *They were wicked.* "Workers of iniquity." The expression denotes great activity in wickedness, and is justly applied to Saul and his base agents.

2. *They were cruel.* "Bloody men."

They sought the life of the Psalmist though he had done them no wrong. "They make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city." "He compares his enemies to those half-wild dogs, which are the scavengers of the cities of the East. They prowl about the streets at night hunting for offal, and hesitate not to prey upon the dead, and even the feeble and helpless." So fierce and cruel were they. No figure is too

strong to represent the fierce cruelty of Saul towards David.

3. *They were secret.* "They lie in wait for my soul." They were subtle and politic in their designs, and, as it were, lay in ambush that they might destroy his life (1 Sam. xix. 11).

4. *They were strong.* "The mighty are gathered against me." "It is not mere strength," says Barnes, "that is here referred to, but that kind of strength or courage which can be employed in a desperate enterprise, and which is fitted to accomplish any scheme of wickedness, however daring or difficult." Unscrupulous, bold, and strong were the men whom Saul employed against David at this time.

5. *They were resolute and impetuous.* "They run and prepare themselves." Hengstenberg translates: "They run and plant themselves firmly." The terms and the metaphor are military. David compares his enemies to an attacking host, which, having obtained a firm footing on the walls of a beleaguered city, is ready to rush over them, or through the breaches made in them, into the city. They were settled in purpose, and were eager to execute that purpose. "Their feet were swift to shed blood."

6. *They were slanderous.* "Behold, they belch out with their mouth, swords are in their lips." Alexander: "The first verb is expressive of a constant flow or gush. What it is that they thus pour out, although not expressed, may be readily gathered from the context, namely, slanders and reproaches. The *swords in their lips* are significant of sharp and cutting speeches. (See Ps. lv. 21, and comp. lii. 2). Arndt: "Just as a naked sword inflicts wounds, so do lies and calumnies cut in pieces innocent hearts."

7. *They were practically atheistic.* "For who, say they, doth hear?" They were wholly destitute of the fear of God. They acted as though there were no God. (Comp. Ps. x. 11.)

Such were the foes by which the poet was assailed on this occasion. They were calculated to strike terror into a brave heart.

II. The Prayer of the persecuted.

"Deliver me from mine enemies," &c. Notice—

1. *The requests presented.* David entreats God—(1) *For defence.* "Defend me from them that rise up against me." Margin: "Set me on high," &c. He seeks to be raised far above the reach of his enemies, and above all fear of them. The man who trusts in God "shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." (2) *For deliverance.* "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity" &c. The foes were many, the danger was great; but the Psalmist knew that God could thwart their designs, and deliver him from their hands. (3) *For judgment on his enemies.* "Thou, therefore, O Lord God of hosts," &c. (ver. 5). On "*all the heathen.*" Perowne says, "The nations, to an Israelite, would be the embodiment of all that opposed itself to God; and in appealing to God to punish them, he would, in fact, be appealing to Him to punish all evil wherever manifested. The special judgment would follow from the universal, and be an instance of it. . . . To the true Israelite, the whole outer heathen world was a world lying under the heavy wrath of God, and to him the greater part of Israel itself seemed corrupt and apostate." The Psalmist entreats God to visit them in judgment. The persecutors of the servants of God and the enemies of His cause will certainly meet with the punishment which they deserve, unless they penitently turn from their evil ways. When He arises for the help of His people He will smite their foes in His anger.

2. *The pleas by which these requests are urged.* He pleads—(1) *The might and malice of his foes.* In this he found a powerful reason why God should help him. The greatness of our danger and our need are strong arguments with Him. (2) *His own innocence.* "Not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord. Without my fault," &c. David had not in any way injured Saul, or any of his enemies. So clear was he in this respect, that he could appeal to the great Searcher of hearts that he had,

neither in heart nor in action, wronged Saul, or merited this treatment from him. "There are two kinds of innocence, one before God, the other before men." David was quite conscious of the latter kind of innocence. However great a sinner he was against God, he knew he had not injured Saul even in thought. When seeking deliverance from God from such dangers this is a powerful plea. (3). *The might and majesty of God.* "Thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts," &c. These names are not empty formulas or poetical figures. As "Lord God of hosts" all forces bow to His command. He cannot be overmatched. The names and titles add force to the argument. (4). *His personal relation to God.* "Oh, my God . . . the God of Israel." Blessed are they who, in their trials and perils, can plead their personal relation to Him, &c.

III. The confidence of the persecuted. The Psalmist was not dismayed by reason of his enemies, but confident in the all-sufficiency of his God.

1. *In God as infinitely superior to his enemies.* "Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them," &c. It is for God a light matter to confound their designs, &c. (Comp. Ps. ii. 4).

2. *In God as his sure defence.* "Because of His strength will I wait upon Thee; for God is my defence." Conant: "My strength, I will wait on Thee; for God is my defence." God is our high place. In Him we are inviolably secure

—far above the reach of the utmost effort of our enemies.

3. *In God as a gracious and timely Deliverer.* "The God of my mercy shall prevent me," &c. Conant: "God with His loving-kindness will anticipate me." Moll: "My God will come to meet me with His grace." Spurgeon: "How frequently have we met with preventing mercy—the supply prepared before the need occurred—the refuge built before the danger arose. Far ahead into the future the foreseeing grace of heaven has projected itself, and forestalled every difficulty." So David rose triumphant over his trials and fears, &c.

CONCLUSION.—What message has this chapter from the history of the pious Psalmist for us in our life to-day? 1. *The godly are still subject to sore trials, sometimes to bitter persecutions, &c.* 2. *Happy are they who, in their trials, are conscious of their innocence.* Suffering is far more severe and intolerable when it is the direct result of sin, and is accompanied with a sense of guilt, than when we are sustained by the consciousness of our integrity. 3. *More happy are they who, in their trials and perils, can look to God for defence and deliverance as a God in covenant relations with themselves.* "Oh, my God . . . The God of Israel." In Him they have all-sufficiency. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

THE DIVERSE DESTINIES OF MEN MANIFESTING THE REIGN OF GOD.

(Verses 11-17.)

The Psalmist here prays for, or, as some say, predicts, the infliction of the judgment of God upon the wicked who were persecuting him, and announces his determination to celebrate the praise of his protecting and delivering God.

I. The destiny of the enemies of the good. Their destiny is here set forth in two aspects.

1. *Life protracted in misery.* "Slay them not," &c. Here are three elements of misery. (1). *Fruitless wanderings.*

"Scatter them by Thy power." Hengstenberg: "Make them wander up and down through Thy power." It is a prayer that God would lead them astray, so that they might fail of their object. This verb is used of Cain (Gen. iv. 12), and of Israel in the wilderness (Num. xxxii. 13). The wicked do miss the mark in life. They achieve no great purposes. And, even when they are able to carry their plans to a successful issue, they find no satisfaction in the

result. (2). *Heavy afflictions.* "Bring them down, O Lord our shield." God will certainly humble and abase the enemies of His people. Calvin: "He wills that they should be thrown down from their honourable position, be cast, as it were, before one's feet, so that they may afford in their misery and disgrace a standing spectacle of the Divine indignation." (3). *Want of satisfaction.* "And at evening let them return," &c., vers. 14, 15. Ver. 14 is a repetition of ver. 6. The idea is, Let them come, and prowl and howl in vain, and meet with the mortifying disappointment which they deserve. The marginal rendering of ver. 15 is correct. "As for them, they shall wander up and down for food, if they be not satisfied, then they will stay all night." They shall wander in search of food and find none, and shall pass the night full of disgust and pain from unsatisfied cravings. "It is the image of a wretched existence in hunger and pain." Wickedness does not satisfy its agents. The evil heart is not restful. It is a stranger to satisfaction and peace. "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest," &c. The Psalmist prays that this disappointment and wretchedness may befall his enemies, that they may thus become monuments of the righteousness of the Divine rule.

2. *Life ending in ruin.* "Consume them in wrath," &c. Perowne: "This does not contradict the previous imprecation. He would have his enemies destroyed at last, but only *after* they had been, by a protracted, miserable existence, a warning to men of God's righteous severity." The idea and desire of the Poet was, that God would visit them with one judgment after another, and ultimately bring them to utter ruin. Wickedness, if persisted in, must terminate in destruction. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Let it be distinctly noted that the *destiny of the wicked is directly connected with their sin.* "For the sin of their mouth," &c. On the sin of their mouth we have remarked on ver. 7. The destruction of the wicked is viewed as the just consequence of their sin. The

slander, pride, and cruelty of the enemies of David drew down upon them the righteous judgments of heaven. Men meeten themselves by wickedness for ruin before God dooms them to it. A man's hell grows out of his own character and conduct.

II. *The destiny of the suffering good.* In the midst of his persecutions and trials the Psalmist confidently anticipates a life of devout and hearty praise. Notice—

1. *The object of his praise.* "Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing." God was the source of the strength of the Psalmist. In Him he found all that he needed, and to Him his praise was offered.

2. *The reason of his praise.* "For Thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. For God is my defence, the God of my mercy." The rich grace of God toward us, and His sure protection of us, are a most sufficient reason for heartiest and grateful praise.

3. *The theme of his praise.* "I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy." M. Henry: "Power, without mercy, is to be dreaded; mercy, without power, is not what a man can expect much benefit from; but God's power by which He is able to help us, and His mercy by which He is inclined to help us, will justly be the everlasting praise of all the saints."

4. *The manner of his praise.* (1.) He would "*sing.*" Devout song is a natural and becoming expression of gratitude and joy. (2.) He would "*sing aloud.*" In this way he would make his boast in the Lord, and seek to enkindle the spirit of worship in others. (3.) He would "*sing aloud in the morning.*" The morning is the emblem of deliverance from trial, of prosperity and of joy. Morning is the beautiful symbol of the destiny of the righteous. God will turn the darkness of their night of suffering into the beautiful light of the morning of gladness. (Comp. 2 Sam. xxiii. 4; Job xi. 17; Ps. xc. 14, xcii. 2). The wicked are advancing to the thick darkness of a dread night: the righteous to the unwaning light of a joyous day.

III. The reign of God manifested in these diverse destinies. The dark destiny of the wicked, and the joyous one of the good, are regarded by the Psalmist as supplying evidence of the righteous government of God. "Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth." David desired that it might be known among the nations that God ruled over His people—not the cruel and wicked Saul, but the holy God. His feeling was similar to that to which he gave expression as he encountered Goliath, "That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." The design of God's judgments is to convince men that the Lord reigneth. They aim not merely at the punishment of the impenitent, but at the warning of the wicked, the confirmation of the faith of believers, and the instruction of all men.

CONCLUSION.—1. *If there be revenge*

found in the desire of the Psalmist concerning his enemies, in that he is not an example to us. In him revenge cannot be commendable. In us, in this Christian dispensation, it would be exceedingly sinful.

2. *Yet wickedness brings misery and leads to ruin. It is well that it does. It would be evil and unspeakably calamitous were it otherwise. Every right-minded and true-hearted man must approve this,—rejoice in this.* 3. *So righteousness tendeth to life and peace and joy. He who by faith is interested in the Divine power and mercy may triumph even in the midst of his enemies. "Light is sown for the righteous," &c.* 4. *Though appearances sometimes seem inconsistent with the supremacy of the righteous government of God, yet he ever ruleth, and in the end His government shall be universally acknowledged.*

MEDITATION AND PRAISE.

(Verses 16, 17.)

Consider—

I. The subject of the Psalmist's meditation.

1. *He meditated upon the Divine mercy.* All the perfections of the Divine nature are glorious and furnish matter for delightful meditation. But it is from His mercy that we draw our chief consolation, encouragement, and hope. Every good man has an experimental knowledge of the mercy of God. In every age God has exercised his mercy to men; but the gift of Christ is its grandest expression. To seek an interest in the mercy of God is of the first importance.

2. *He contemplated God as his refuge in trouble.* "Thou hast been my defence and refuge," &c. To have a refuge in time of trouble is desirable. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." We have every encouragement to put our trust in God. He is represented as a "rock," a "fortress," a "high tower," a "shield," and a "buckler." God as a refuge—(1.) Is near,—always at hand. (2.) Affords the greatest security. (3.) Is suitable.

Our troubles differ, but He is a suitable refuge in every trouble. (4.) David proved God as his refuge. Saul had laid plots to destroy him, but the Lord had delivered him. We also have obtained support and relief by trusting in God.

3. *He contemplated God as his strength and confided in His power.* "I will sing of thy power. Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing." In what respects are we to consider God as the strength of His people? (1.) He defends them from danger by His power. (2.) He assists and strengthens them for duty by His grace.

II. The influence of the Psalmist's meditation. It led him to praise God. "I will sing," &c.

1. *Praising God is most reasonable.*

2. *Is a pleasant and delightful exercise.*

3. *Should be a part of every day's employment.* Divine goodness is daily manifested and should be daily acknowledged.

4. *Will tend to prepare us to meet the trials which may yet be before us.*

5. *Will tend to meeten us for the enjoyment of heaven.*

6. *Requires a suitable frame of mind.* True praise springs from gratitude; and is promoted by a consideration of what God is, what He has done for us, and what he has promised to do for us.

CONCLUSION.—1. *How great are the privileges of the people of God!* 2. *How important seriously to consider whether we are interested in these privileges.* 3. *Learn the importance of continuing to make God our refuge in trouble.*—*Abridged from an unpublished M.S.*

PSALM LX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "*Upon Shushan-eduth*," is probably a musical direction to the leader of the choir. In the superscription to Psalms xlv., lxix., and lxxx., we have Shoshannim, the plural of Shushan. See Introduction to Ps. xlv. "*Shushan-eduth*" signifies "the lily of testimony," and, possibly, contains the first words of some psalm to the melody of which this psalm was to be sung. "*Michtam of David*." See Introduction to Ps. lvi. "*To teach*." Moll: "As for the expression 'to teach,' there is nothing to decide whether it designates the psalm as designed for the instruction of posterity, or whether it refers particularly to the design of bringing the unmanageable tribes to recognise the Divine choice of David by teaching them that his government was pleasing to God, or whether it states directly its purpose of being committed to memory by the people on account of its national significance, as Deut. xxxi. 19, or whether it is to be explained by 2 Sam. i. 18, and, accordingly, is to be regarded as a song of military exercise, which was to be sung in connection with shooting with the bow." "*When he strove with Aram-naharaim*," &c. "*Aram-naharaim*," or Aram of the two rivers, is a name sometimes applied to Syria or Mesopotamia. "*Aram-Zobah*" is the name of a portion of Syria, which at this time formed a separate kingdom. Its exact position and limits cannot now be determined. "*The valley of salt*," says Robinson, "can be nothing else than the district adjoining the Salt-Mountain, to the south of the Dead Sea, which, in reality, formed the boundary between the ancient territories of Judah and Edom." The events referred to in the superscription are recorded in 2 Sam. viii., and 1 Chron. xviii. This victory is here said to have been achieved by Joab; but in 2 Sam. viii. 13, it is attributed to David; and, in 2 Chron. xviii. 12, Abishai is mentioned as the conqueror. The explanation of Michaelis is admirable: "David, as king, Joab, as commander-in-chief, and Abishai, as sent by his brother on this particular expedition, defeated the enemy." There is a difference in the number mentioned as slain. Here, it is said to be twelve thousand; but in 2 Sam. viii. 13, and 1 Chron. xviii. 12, it is said to be eighteen thousand. The discrepancy may indicate that both numbers are mere estimates, or it may have arisen from a mistake of a copyist, or, as seems to us most probable, it is accounted for in this way, that here the reference is to one engagement, while the history refers to the entire campaign.

COMPLAINT, PRAYER, AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

(Verses 1-4.)

It is probable that the lamentation and petitions of verses 1-3 are a record of past experiences, not the utterance of present feelings, because the psalm refers to a time when a considerable measure of prosperity had been granted to Israel. The Poet speaks in the psalm not as an individual, but as the mouth-piece of the whole people. In this first strophe we have three homiletic points—

I. Complaint. (Verses 1-3).

1. *Great calamities are here complained of.* "Thou hast broken us; Thou hast made the earth to tremble;

Thou hast broken it; it shaketh; Thou hast showed Thy people hard things; Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." The reference is to the severe injuries and "losses which Israel had formerly sustained in the war against the Syrians, and especially through the irruption of the Edomites." The figures employed by the Psalmist—the trembling and rent land, the people broken, and prostrate as though drunk with strong wine—indicate the greatness of the calamities, and the deep sense of them realised by the people. The

Church of God upon earth is sometimes visited with sore trials, and is called to pass through fiery persecutions, which cause bitter lamentation, &c.

2. *These calamities are regarded as signs of the Divine displeasure.* "O God, Thou hast cast us off, Thou hast been displeased." It seemed to them in their distresses that God treated them as though they were loathsome and offensive to Him, and as though He were angry with them. Their miseries and calamities are viewed as coming from Him. When His people grievously sin against Him, God withdraws from them the shield of His protection, and allows their enemies to triumph over them.

3. *The Divine displeasure is always the result of human sin.* Perowne: "When men will drink presumptuously of the cup of their wickedness, God forces it, as it were, into their hands, till they have drained the very dregs as the cup of His wrath." He never casts off man until man has first cast off Him. Never forsakes a church until that church has first forsaken Him.

II. Prayer. The Psalmist prays—

1. *For the restoration of the Divine favour.* "O turn Thyself to us again;" *i.e.*, be gracious to us again, restore to us the signs of Thy favour and friendship. When the favour of God is restored to His people, their prosperity and triumph will not be long delayed. "In Thy favour our horn shall be exalted."

2. *For the repair of their calamities.* "Heal the breaches thereof." Repair the disasters which have befallen Thy people. Grant unto them their former prosperity and power. Such is the meaning of the petition. Moll: "Wars are for nations what earthquakes are for their lands; God sometimes visits men with both, and then likewise strikes the congregation with hard blows and shakes them; but He heals again the breaches and rents which arise thereby." The Church, in times of distress, should always seek God in prayer. Prayer imparts *patience* under trial, *power* to grapple with difficulty, *deliverance* from distress and calamity.

III. Encouragement. "Thou hast given a banner," &c. From an examination of the context, we conclude that the "*banner*" is the promise of salvation which God has given to Israel, and "*the truth*" is the faithfulness and trustworthiness of the promise. The following are the chief points in this verse as related to the main scope of the Psalm.

1. *God has given to His people most glorious promises.* What rich and splendid promises He gave to ancient Israel! Victory over their enemies, salvation from calamities, undisturbed possession of Canaan, &c. What "exceeding great and precious promises" He has given to His spiritual Israel!

2. *These promises are thoroughly reliable.* "Displayed because of the truth." "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

3. *Being so glorious and so reliable, these promises should be conspicuously exhibited, that men may trust in them.* The banner must "be displayed." These promises of salvation are compared "to a highly exalted banner, which serves as a signal to one lying prostrate in his misery, to rise up." To the people of God in depression and distress, let us exhibit the promises which He has given to them.

4. *The precious and faithful promises of God should inspire His people with hope and courage in the time of trial.* This we take to be the chief idea in this verse. The promises encouraged Israel in their distresses and calamities. And in the present, to the people of God in time of trial, they should impart hope, and, in their prayers for relief, they should strengthen their faith.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the people of God beware of sin, for it is the parent of darkness, distress, &c.* 2. *Let the distressed seek Him in penitence and prayer, &c.* 3. *Let them be encouraged in doing so by the exceeding great and precious promises which He has given to them.*

THE GLORIOUS CONFLICT.

(Verse 4.)

We have given above what we regard as the meaning of this verse in its relation to the context. We purpose regarding it at present, as setting forth certain features of the great conflict with evil in which the people of God are engaged. Notice—

I. The object of the conflict. Many wars have been waged for mean, selfish, ambitious, wicked objects. But here is a banner given for a most worthy object, "that it might be displayed because of the truth." The people of God fight for the banishment of ignorance and the promotion of knowledge; for the overthrow of error and the enthronement of truth; for the destruction of evil and the diffusion of goodness; for the utter defeat of the father of lies, and the complete, universal, and perpetual triumph of the King of truth. Here is a holy war—a war against all injustice, falsehood, error, oppression, evil; and in favour of righteousness, truth, kindness, holiness.

II. The character of the soldiers. "Them that fear Thee." They reverence God; they obey Him, &c. Notice—

1. *The expulsive power of this fear.* It expels all other fear. He who fears God much will fear neither men nor devils at all.

2. *The impulsive power of this fear.* It inspires enthusiasm in the holy cause—imparts courage in the conflict, &c. Cromwell's Ironsides were men who feared God, and acted as ever in His presence. Their time before going to battle was spent in prayer, and they went into the fight singing psalms. Their watchword was, "The Lord of hosts is

with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." They were never defeated. The men to do the work and fight the battles of the Lord must be godly men—men who fear Him.

III. The authority of the Commander. "Thou hast given a banner." God has given to His people the standard as of an army, that they might go forth and fight His battles. He has commissioned His people for this war, and He commands them in it. In this we have a guarantee of—

1. *The rectitude of the conflict.* He would not send us forth in an unrighteous cause, or with unrighteous weapons, or in an unworthy manner. The object, the weapons, and the methods of this war are all righteous and honourable.

2. *Support in the conflict.* To every soldier fighting beneath His banner, He says, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He supports the workman in the vineyard, and the warrior on the battle-plain.

3. *Victory in the conflict.* The battle may be long and arduous, but the issue is certain victory to those who fight in the cause of God. He who has given us our banner will also give us the palm of the victor.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Under whose banner are you fighting?* "Who is on the Lord's side?" 2. *Who will enlist under the banner of the Cross?* Christ, our Leader, will receive loyal recruits. 3. *Courage, ye soldiers of Christ, for you shall gain the victory.* Teacher, preacher, &c., go on; for you shall surely win the well-fought day.

HUMAN PERFECTION.

(Verses 5–12.)

In these verses David rejoices in the victories already achieved by Israel, and in the possession of the promised land so far as they had attained it, and relying on the promises of God, he looks

forward to complete victory and possession of the entire land. The promises made to ancient Israel illustrate the promises given to the Christian believer. Canaan is a type of the spiritual inherit-

ance of the Christian. In this way we see here an illustration of human perfection.

I. The nature of human perfection. Here are three aspects of it.

1. *Salvation from troubles.* "That Thy beloved may be delivered, save with Thy right hand, and hear me. . . . Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man." The troubles of human life upon earth are many and sometimes severe. But God saves His people from them. He does so sometimes—(1) *By removing the cause of the trouble.* Or (2) *By giving grace to bear the trouble* (2 Cor. xii. 9). Or (3) *By revealing the meaning and uses of trouble* (2 Cor. iv. 10-18). (4) *By sanctifying trouble to promote the well-being of the troubled* (Rom. viii. 28). By the grace of God, the Christian rises superior to trouble, makes it minister to his spiritual advancement, and shall soon pass away from it for ever.

2. *Victory over enemies.* Israel had to contend with Philistia, Moab, and Edom; but, in His holiness, God had promised them complete victory over every enemy. The Christian has to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil—against evil in himself, and in society; but he has the promise of more than victory (Rom. viii. 37, xvi. 20; Eph. vi. 10-13).

3. *Possession of promised privileges.* God had promised to Israel the complete and peaceful possession of Canaan. The Psalmist looked forward to the realisation of that promise. Glorious are the blessings promised to the Christian—pardon, peace, holiness, fellowship with God, heaven. Here are some of the promised privileges (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27; 2 Cor. iii. 18; 2 Pet. i. 4; 1 John i. 3, iii. 2). Surely in these promises we have the perfection of being. To have God's Spirit within us, and to walk in His statutes; to be changed into the image of the glory of the Lord; to be partakers of the Divine nature; to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; to be the sons of God, and to look forward to the vision of God and likeness to Him—this is human perfection.

II. The attainment of human perfection. This is here set before us as—

1. *Promised by God.* "God hath spoken in His holiness." Moll: "It is most appropriate to understand this promise, which refers to the duration of the possession of the promised land, and the supremacy over neighbouring nations, not of a special oracle given through the Urim and Thummim of the high-priest, or the answer just sought, nor to limit it to the promise given to David (2 Sam. vii. 9 sq.), and, as a figurative reproduction of the same, but to regard it as a free summary of the ancient prophecies, especially those contained in the Pentateuch." God has promised clearly and repeatedly to the believer the perfection of being and blessedness. He "hath spoken in His holiness." He has promised as a holy God, One who is infinitely superior to deceit and change, One who is true, and who ever fulfils His word. The Christian's hope of perfection rests upon that promise.

2. *Promoted by prayer.* The Psalmist prays for the fulfilment of the promise. In so doing—(1), *he appeals to the Divine strength.* "Save with Thy right hand." With the right hand man wields the sword, hurls the spear, effects his tasks, &c. God has power to achieve His purposes and fulfil His promises. He is "mighty to save." "He "is able to do exceeding abundantly," &c. (2). The Psalmist *pleads the Divine relationship.* "Thy beloved." God's people are dear to Him as the apple of His eye. He has loved them with an everlasting love. This love is one of the most effective pleas which they can urge in their prayers to Him. (3). The Psalmist *pleads the vanity of human help.* "Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man." Man is unreliable because of the limitation of his power, and because of his mutability. In God is our hope. To Him we direct our prayer. Prayer is a condition of blessing.

3. *Guaranteed by past triumphs and present possessions.* "I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem," &c. (vers. 6-10). Shechem on the west of Jordan, and Succoth on the east; Gilead (including

the territory occupied by the tribes of Gad and Reuben) and Manasseh on the east, and Ephraim and Judah on the west, are mentioned as representing the whole land of Canaan. The powerful tribe of Ephraim is spoken of as the strength of the head, *i.e.*, the great protector of the most vital interests of the nation in time of war. Judah is named as the lawgiver, probably in reference to the ancient prediction, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah," &c. (Gen. xlix. 10). Ephraim was the helmet, and Judah the sceptre of the chosen people. All the land of Canaan east and west of the Jordan, which the Poet thus brings into view, was subdued. Moab also was conquered. "Moab is my washpot," is a phrase denoting that the Moabites were completely reduced to servitude to Israel (2 Sam. viii. 2). But the victory of Israel was not complete. Edom remained unsubdued. But its subjugation is anticipated. "Upon Edom will I cast my shoe." Moab, in the preceding clause, is described as a mean vessel, in which the feet are washed, and now Edom is spoken of as a servant of the lowest grade, to whom the sandals are thrown, to be removed and cleaned. Or the figure of casting the shoe may signify the placing of the foot upon Edom in token of its complete subjection. There is no doubt that the idea is, that Edom should be completely vanquished by and subjected to Israel. Philistia is also described as conquered. During the period of the Judges the Philistines had severely oppressed Israel; but David completely conquered them (2 Sam. viii. 1). "The strong city" was the rock-built and fortified city of Petra, the capital of Idumea or Edom. From the victories already achieved, David

was encouraged to believe that God would lead him into Petra, and to complete victory over the Idumeans. So in our spiritual history, our past triumphs and present attainments contribute to our assurance of the full realisation of the privileges which God has promised. They do so in two ways. (1). *Our past achievements tend both to encourage and to qualify us for further achievements in the future.* (2). *God's goodness and faithfulness in the past are an assurance of His blessing in the future.* Thus every temptation conquered is a prophecy of the full and final victory. Every privilege enjoyed is a pledge of the complete possession of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled," &c.

4. *Demanding strenuous effort.* "Through God we shall do valiantly." We must "do valiantly" if we would attain perfection. If we would gain the victory we must fight manfully in the battle. If we would wear the crown we must patiently bear the cross. If we would win the prize we must run the race that is set before us diligently even to the end (Luke xii. 24; 1 Cor. ix. 24-27; Heb. xii. 1, 2).

5. *Ascribed to God.* "Through God we shall do valiantly; for He shall tread down our enemies." He gives us courage in battle, patience in trial, strength in labour. Our salvation was begun by Him, and He alone can perfect it. To Him be all the praise. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory," &c.

God in Christ is the beginning and the end, the commencement and the crown, of human perfection. "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power."

PSALM LXI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." See introduction to Ps. lvii. "*Upon Neginah.*" Hebrew: *Neginath*. "The LXX. and Vulg., evidently read *Neginoth* in the plural, which occurs in the title of five psalms, and is perhaps the true reading. Whether the word be singular or plural, it is the general term by which all stringed instruments are described." "*Of David.*" The contents of the psalm confirm the title as to its Davidic authorship. The psalm was probably composed by David when he was in exile in consequence of the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. xv. xviii., especially xvii. 22).

THE CRY OF A TROUBLED HEART.

(Verses 1-4.)

We have here—

I. A painful experience. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." The experience of David included—

1. *Distressing exile.* "From the end of the earth" is an expression denoting a painful sense of removal to a great distance from the dwelling-place of God. The country to the east of Jordan, into which David had been compelled to retreat, was not accounted the Lord's land properly. (Comp. Num. xxxii. 29; Josh. xxii. 19). In this country the Psalmist felt himself as it were banished to the extremity of the earth, far from the face of God. He was far from the city that he loved most, from his home, from his throne, and from the tabernacle of his God. To the godly soul separation from the ordinances of worship is a sore trial.

2. *Overwhelming sorrow.* "When my heart is overwhelmed." Moll: "In the covering of my heart." The idea is that his heart was enveloped with trouble. Anxiety and grief wrapped his soul as a garment. Terribly bitter and painful were the experiences of the Psalmist at this time. Our souls, too, have known the bitterness and desolation of great sorrows and severe trials. Like David, there are times when we are in anguish because of the feeling of absence from God, and the rebellion of our own children, and the ingratitude and treachery of those we esteemed our friends, &c.

II. A fervent prayer. "Hear my cry, O God," &c.

1. *The object of the prayer.* The Psalmist seeks *Divine audience*. "Hear my cry, O God." And *Divine consideration*. "Attend unto my prayer." But the chief object of his prayer was *Divine protection*. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." More correctly: "Lead me to a rock that is too high for me;" i.e., a rock so high that he could not ascend it by his own power, and which his enemies would

not be able to ascend. His own resources were inadequate to secure his safety; so he seeks the protection of God. The high rock is a frequent figure for security. He who stands upon it is far above the reach of his enemies. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the true Rock for human souls.

2. *The self-distrust involved in this prayer.* "Lead me" is the cry of the man who feels incompetent to direct his own steps, or choose his own path. "To a rock that is too high for me," indicates a sense of insufficiency and the abandonment of self-dependence. If we are to be secure and blessed, we must be led to ONE who is far above us in wisdom, power, &c.

3. *The personality of this prayer.* "Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer," &c. "Though all men pray," says Dr. Parker, "yet each man has his own prayer. The heart has its own way of telling its own tales, and cannot be satisfied with paraphrase or generalisation. It must tell all its sins, and set forth in order its troubles, its plagues, and its high desires; with brokenness of speech, which is often the most perfect of eloquence, it must recite the number of its failures, and tell of all its groping and stumbling along the path of life. No man will it accept as a hired advocate; no voice could do it justice; it must utter my cry and my prayer, and where it cannot find words it will heave the sigh or the groan which asks God to be His own interpreter. We may have great helps in prayer, the spirit may accept the choicely wise and tender words of other men; yet there is a point at which the heart breaks away to hold secret intercourse with the Father and Saviour of men."

This is indeed a fervent prayer—a pathetic, urgent, earnest cry of the human heart to God.

III. A cheering recollection. "Thou hast been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy." In former times God had been to the Psalmist a

sure refuge, had preserved him safely amid many and great dangers, &c. To the thoughtful and devout heart life abounds with memorials of the Divine goodness and faithfulness. "It is inexpressibly important to keep the mind up to a full realisation of all that God has done in one's personal history. When a man's own history goes for nothing with him, he may be regarded as having sunk below the level of a man; but if he will watch how God has developed his life, how wondrously He has turned it, how gently He has withdrawn it into 'shelter' when the storm was coming, how graciously He has placed it in the 'strong tower' when sounds of war shook the air, he will be moved from thankfulness to eloquence, and will say to those who doubtfully look on—"In God is my salvation and my glory;" &c. Recollections such as this of David's should be cherished; because—

1. *They impress us with our obligations to God.*

2. *They inspire us with hope in time of trial, and courage in time of danger.*

IV. **An exemplary resolution.** "I

will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever;" &c. The Psalmist's recollection of past mercies inspired him with confidence in his present dangers. "Few of us would be doubtful of the future if we would make a right use of the past." "Experience is the nurse of faith." Trusting in God, the Psalmist looks forward to a life of—

1. *Perpetual worship.* "I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever." He has a firm assurance that he will be restored to his home and to the public worship of God. It may be, perhaps, that he looked forward to a home in heaven with God for ever. A life of worship is ennobling and blessed.

2. *Hearty confidence.* "I will trust in the covert of Thy wings." A very tender and assuring figure, suggestive of *affection, security, rest.* Such was the full and hearty trust of the Psalmist in God.

CONCLUSION.—Let us aspire and strive after a life of confidence and worship. Such a life will raise us above the dread of dangers, will bring to us rest and comfort in the midst of sore trials, and will lead us to the tabernacle of God as our eternal home.

THE SHELTERING ROCK.

(Verse 2.)

I. **The season referred to.** "When my heart is overwhelmed." There are seasons in which the soul of the Christian is overwhelmed:—1. *From a sense of the Divine claims on our obedience* (Deut. vi. 5; Matt. xxii. 37). 2. *From the pressure of heavy trials* (Psa. lv. 12-14). 3. *From the keenness of temptation.* The very best of men are subject to temptation. Moses and David, Daniel and Job. Yea, Christ Himself. 4. *From the anticipations of future evils.*

II. **Whither the Psalmist desires to be led.** "To the rock that is higher than I." The rock gives the idea—1.

Of strength (Psa. lxii. 2, 6, 8). 2. *Durability.* "I am the Lord, I change not." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

III. **The grounds of the Psalmist's plea.** "From the ends of the earth," &c. 1. *This prayer is prompted by a consciousness of need.* 2. *In this prayer we have the true source of ability addressed.* 3. *In this prayer we see the encouragement he derives from past experience.* "For Thou hast been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy." —GEO. STOCKDALE, in "*The Pulpit Analyst.*"

THE CONFIDENCE OF A TROUBLED HEART.

(Verses 5-8.)

We have here—

I. **Confidence of safety and stability in God.** "Thou wilt prolong the king's

life; his years as many generations. He shall abide before God for ever." These expressions of confidence are

variously interpreted. They are interpreted of (α) *David himself*—that God would deliver him out of the danger in which he was placed, would grant him long life, and restore him to the throne and the tabernacle without danger of being driven into exile again. (β) *Of the dynasty of David*. Hengstenberg: "David speaks designedly of the days of the *king* instead of his *own* days for the purpose of showing that he considered the promise of eternal dominion as relating not to himself personally, but to his family—the royal family of David." (γ) *Of the Messiah*. "David, realising that he is the anointed of the Lord, does not always distinguish between himself and the Messianic dynasty, so that the latter thought fills up as it were the background of his consciousness."

We certainly have here an expression of his assurance of his own safety and stability. His occupancy of the throne was imperilled. Absalom and the rebel army sought to take even his life. But he was confident that God would preserve his life, and restore him to his throne. "He shall abide before God for ever," may signify more than a constant abode at Jerusalem in the enjoyment of the ordinances of worship. Barnes: "His restoration to his home, to his throne, and to the privileges of the sanctuary, he may have regarded as an emblem of his ultimate reception into a peaceful heaven, and his mind may have glanced rapidly from the one to the other. On earth, after his restoration, he would have no fear that he would be banished again; in heaven, of which such a restoration might be regarded as an emblem, there would be no change, no exile."

Notwithstanding the subtlety and malice and power of his enemies, the spiritual interests of the godly man are perfectly secured by Divine grace (John x. 28, 29; Rom. viii. 31–39; 2 Tim. i. 12). Every faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus may through Him triumph in the assurance of "a crown of glory that fadeth not away," and of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled," &c.

II. Confidence arising out of past experiences. "Thou, O God, hast heard my vows; Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name."

1. *David had proved the efficacy of prayer*. His vows included petitions. They were prayers accompanied with solemn promises. Prayer was not a mere theory or form with David, not a spiritual gymnastic either. He knew its reality and power and preciousness by experience.

2. *He had received the heritage of the godly*. "Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name." Perowne: "Primarily this would be the land of Canaan, and then it would include all blessings, temporal and spiritual, which were in fact implied and comprised in the possession of the land." Glorious is the heritage of those who fear God now (Rom. viii. 16, 17). It is clear, from both the experience of the Psalmist and the statement of the apostle, that *the heritage of the godly may include severe trials*. It is a point of great practical importance.

These past experiences were an encouragement to the Psalmist to trust God in his present dangers and trials. "History is rightly used when it becomes the guide of hope. Yesterday enriches to-day. All the historic triumphs of the Divine arm stimulate us in the present battle." What God has been and done is an earnest of what He will yet be and do. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

III. Confidence expressing itself in prayer. "Oh, prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him."

1. *He looks for preservation to God as the covenant God*. "Mercy and truth," loving-kindness and faithfulness, are the attributes which the Psalmist is accustomed to mention when he looks to God as a Being in covenant relations with His people. In His "mercy" God has entered into gracious engagements with His people; and in His "truth" He will fulfil those engagements.

2. *His confidence does not supersede, but stimulate prayer*. Presumption may lead to neglect of prayer; but faith

quickens it. The attitude of true confidence is that of the bent knee and the uplifted eye.

IV. Confidence issuing in constant praise. "So will I sing praise unto Thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows." As the result of his trial and prayer and assurance the Psalmist looked forward to—

1. *The ascription of praise to God.* "His praising God was itself the performance of his vows." He felt and acknowledged the binding force of the vows which he had made to God. And their fulfilment he regarded not as a duty merely, but as a joyous privilege.

2. *The ascription of praise to God constantly.* "Praise for ever, . . . daily perform my vows." Praise to God should not be an occasional exercise, but a permanent element in the spirit of our entire life. Gratitude, reverence, and trust should characterise us at all times and under all circumstances.

CONCLUSION.—In the trials of life let the Psalmist, in this exercise of strong and devout confidence in God in the time of his great trial, be to us both an *example* and an *encouragement*. Be encouraged to exercise trust in God, and imitate the character of this trust.

PSALM LXII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." See introduction to Psa. lvii. "*To Jeduthun*." See introduction to Psa. xxxix. "*A Psalm of David*." "There are no historical statements or decisive references to known events in the life of David," says Moll; "yet the relationships with Psa. xxxix. on the one side, and with Psa. iv. on the other, point to the time of his persecution by Absalom. This relation with Psalm xxxix. makes it desirable to translate the characteristic **78** which is repeated (vers. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9) not by, *yea, surely*; but by, *only*. . . . In order to allow the designed repetition of the same word to be clearly manifest in the translation, it is better to retain the translation *only* as this is appropriate throughout. For the assertion, that *only* with God is the soul entirely quieted (ver. 1), because God *only* is the rock (ver. 2), upon which, when the singer is established, he can designate as vain (ver. 3) the attacks of those who *only* desire to cast him down from his high place (ver. 4);—this assertion is at once the foundation for the exhortation of his soul, to turn to God *alone* in confident submission (ver. 5), because God *only* is the reliable helper (ver. 6). This repetition forms not only the transition to the renewal of the appropriate personal confession (ver. 7), but likewise to the exhortation of the people to constant trust in God (ver. 8), because men are *only* breath one and all (ver. 9), the trust in temporal possessions, whether goods or powers, is vain (ver. 10); but God has spoken the word, which has been frequently heard, and is valid once for all, that the power is His (ver. 11). Therefore the petitioner, moved by the assurance of the government of God, which recompenses justly, turns to the grace of God which is equally essential with His power (ver. 12)." The psalm is divided into three strophes, each of four verses. Amyraldus calls attention to a peculiar characteristic of this psalm, viz., that it does not contain any expression of "fear or dejection, and there is also no prayer in it, although on other occasions, when in danger, he never omits to pray." Thus the psalm is the utterance of "the full assurance and perfection of faith."

Homiletically we shall view the psalm as setting forth, *The Trial, Triumph, and Exhortation of faith*.

THE TRIAL AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

(Verses 1-7.)

I. The trial of the good man's faith. The trials of which the Poet speaks in this psalm arose from the assaults of his enemies. Notice—

1. *Their design.* They aimed at the overthrow of the Psalmist. "They only consult to cast him down from his excellency." Couant: "They only consult

to thrust him from his elevation." The "excellency," or "elevation," points to the high station of David, and it is noteworthy that the word to "cast down," or "thrust from," is used in 2 Sam. xv. 14, by David with reference to Absalom. The enemies were envious of David's dignity, and sought to defame

his reputation and to thrust him from his throne. The enemies of the godly seek to drag them down from their spiritual elevation, to overthrow them, by engaging them in sinful practices or pursuits.

2. *Their method.* They endeavoured to carry out their atrocious design—(1). By *violence*. “How long will ye imagine mischief against a man?” &c. We incline to the translation of Conant: “How long will ye rush upon a man, will break him down, all of you, as a wall inclined, as a fence that is thrust down?” Hengstenberg and Hupfield translate רָצַח, *murder*. But Ewald, Delitzsch, Moll, Perowne, *et al.*, translate: *to break down*. The enemies of the Psalmist were violent. They assaulted him by force. They rose in arms against him to effect his overthrow and to destroy him. There have been times in the history of the Christian Church when bonds and imprisonments, fire and sword, have been used against its members. (2). By *deliberation*. “They consult.” They employed subtlety as well as strength to effect their wicked designs. “Craft and power,” says Starke, “are the weapons of the ungodly; if the one is not enough, they seize the other, and not unfrequently make their attacks with both at once.” (3). By *falsehood*. “They delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.” These words are literally true of Absalom. By means of fair speeches, when his heart was false and black, he “stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” In falsehood they took delight. “A chief weapon which the world has always employed in its bitter contest with the Church, has been that of lies.” The great leader of the forces of wickedness is the great liar. (John viii. 44.) Force, subtlety, falsehood are all employed to promote the triumph of evil.

3. *Their cowardice* in all this. “How long will ye rush upon a man, will break him down, all of you?” Mark the contrast—“all” opposed to “a man.” All against one!

Such was the trial of the Psalmist. Will his faith in God bear the strain,

and enable him to rise superior to his troubles? Will he issue from the trial victor, or vanquished? retaining his hold on God, or drifting from Him?

The trial of his faith is an illustration of the trial of the faith of the godly now, both in its design and in its method.

II. The triumph of the good man's faith. The victory of the Psalmist is manifest,—

1. *In his intense realisation of the all-sufficiency of God* (vers. 2, 5, 6, 7). He trusted in God as the rock of his strength, his salvation, his defence, his refuge. Here are the ideas of *abiding and unchanging strength*, a “rock;” *secure shelter and protection*, a “refuge;” *elevation above danger*, a “defence,” or “high-place;” and *complete deliverance from trials and perils*, “my salvation.” Calvin: “The reason why he heaps together so many names of God is, that he may meet and throw back the assaults of Satan, by, as it were, so many shields.” Again: “The epithets which David applies to God, in reference to His power to uphold, are like so many pillars, by which he supports his steadfastness.” Moll: “God can screen believers against their enemies with as many shields as He has names.”

2. *In his reliance upon God alone.* The *only*, which is the characteristic mark of the psalm, is used not less than four times of the Psalmist's trust in God (vers. 1, 2, 5, 6). Spurgeon: “We cannot too often hear the toll of that great bell *only*; let it ring the death-knell of all carnal reliances, and lead us to cast ourselves on the bare arm of God.” In himself alone God is more than sufficient to meet all the needs of His people.

3. *In his assurance of safety and stability.* In ver. 2, he says, “I shall not be greatly moved.” He might be shaken; but would not be overthrown. He might be troubled; but would not be distressed—he might be perplexed; but would not be left in despair, &c. And in ver. 6 he exclaims, “I shall not be moved.” His confidence increased as he sang this psalm of faith. “The more faith is acted the more active it is. It grows by being exercised.” How triumphant was the assurance of

St. Paul as to the security of believers in Christ Jesus! (Rom. viii. 31-39.)

4. *In his rest in God.* "My soul waiteth only upon God." Margin: "My soul is silent," &c. Conant: "Only in God is my soul quieted." Hengstenberg: "Only to God is my soul silent." The silence "denotes the opposite of that state of tumultuous agitation which prevails in the soul as long as it looks anywhere else for help, when in great trouble, than to God." (Comp. Ps. xlii. 5, and xxii. 2.) Barnes:—"The feeling is that which exists when we have entrusted all to God; when, having

entire confidence in His power, His goodness, His wisdom, His mercy, we commit the whole case to Him as if it were no longer our own. Such is the calmness—the peace—the quiet—the silence of the soul—when all is left with God." See on this point the beautiful hymn in "*The Child's Christian Year.*"

"O Lord, how happy should we be
If we could cast our care on Thee," &c.

Here then we have faith triumphantly resting in God. Such triumph may be the portion of every godly soul. (Comp. 1 Pet. i. 3 9.)

THE EXHORTATION OF FAITH.

(Verses 8-12.)

The Psalmist having expressed his own unflinching confidence in God, proceeds in these verses to exhort all men to exercise a similar trust in God. In this exhortation let us consider—

I. The trust prohibited. (Vers. 9 and 10.) The objects of trust which the Psalmist prohibits are—

1. *Man.* "Only vanity are men of low degree," &c. David regards both common men and men of distinction as alike unworthy of confidence:—

(1.) *Because of their inability.* "Only vanity are men of low degree." They are empty, unsubstantial creatures—a mere breath—utterly incapable of aiding any one in the great needs of life. In the ordinary and everyday trials of life men can be sympathetic and helpful to each other; but in its great and deep and solemn experiences how powerless are they to help each other! (2.) *Because of their unfaithfulness.* "Men of high degree are a lie." Men of exalted rank are not to be regarded as the objects of the soul's trust. As an object of confidence man may fail by reason of his want of constancy as well as by his want of power. Test men in this respect, and you will find them either feeble, or false, or both. "To be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." Arndt: "If there were any one among men, immortal, not liable to sin, or to change, whom it were impossible for any

one to overcome, but who was strong as an angel, such a one might be something, but inasmuch as every one is a man, a sinner, mortal, weak, liable to sickness and death, exposed to pain and terror, like Pharaoh, even from the most insignificant animals, and liable to so many miseries, that it is impossible to count them, the conclusion must be a valid one: 'man is nothing.'" "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man," &c. (Jer. xvii. 5, 6.)

2. *Oppression.* "Trust not in oppression." Let no man hope to render himself safe and strong by oppressing others. The victories of the conqueror may be reversed. The arm of the tyrant may be broken. And then the oppressed may arise and crush the oppressor. He who thinks to "strengthen himself in wickedness" will, sooner or later, find that in so doing he has made an utter mistake. (Comp. Ps. lii. 7.)

3. *Unlawfully acquired wealth.* "Become not vain in robbery." There are, we fear, thousands in this nominally Christian land who are trusting in wealth which has been unrighteously obtained. Men who have made their fortunes by robbing their employes of their fair wages, by adulterating their goods or otherwise defrauding in business, by "sharp practice" in trade and speculation, by deceptive advertise-

ments, &c. ;—let not these men pride themselves on their wealth. “Treasures of wickedness profit nothing.” “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you ;” &c. (James v. i-4.)

4. *Lawfully acquired wealth.* “If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.” The word “increase,” or “spring up,” is used as the antithesis of “robbery,” to denote wealth obtained by lawful means. Even such wealth is not to be trusted in. See an outline on *The folly of Trusting in Riches* (Psa. lii. 7).

None of these things constitute a true ground of trust for man. Neither any one of them nor all of them combined can meet his deepest needs—the needs of his awful soul. He who trusts in them is doomed to disappointment, to misery, and to ruin.

II. The trust prescribed. (Vers. 8, 11, 12.)

1. *Its nature.* The Psalmist represents this trust as comprising (1) *Abiding confidence in God.* “Trust in Him at all times.” “We must have an actual confidence in God,” says Matthew Henry, “upon all occasions, trust in Him upon every emergency, to guide us when we are in doubt, to protect us when we are in danger, to supply us when we are in want, to strengthen us for every good word and work.” “At all times,” even in the severest affliction, the extremest danger, &c. (2) *Unreserved communication with God.* “Pour out your heart before Him.” Tell Him all its griefs and fears, all its sins and sorrows, all its hopes and desires. We can thus pour out our heart unto God. We cannot unto man ; not even to the most trusted amongst men.

“Not e’en the tenderest heart, and next
our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile
and sigh.”

But unto God we can unfold our most “secret throbbings.” He is wise, considerate, merciful, &c. We may thus pour out our heart unto Him. He will not repulse us ; but will kindly and patiently listen to us. We should thus pour out our heart unto Him. It is

our duty as well as our privilege to fully unburden the heart to God. (3) This trust is represented as an exercise for all “people.” Not simply the people of Israel are meant by “ye people,” but all mankind. “All shall be welcome to trust in God, for He is the confidence of all the ends of the earth.”

2. *Its ground.* “God is a refuge for us. . . . God hath spoken once,” &c. (1) God is the *Almighty refuge* of those who trust in Him. “God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.” The power of God is a guarantee of His ability to protect and save those who trust in Him. This truth God had deeply impressed upon the mind and heart of the Psalmist. “God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard this,” &c. As he had marked God’s works in creation David had heard this testimony—“Power is God’s.” He found the same great truth in the *written Word* ; and had witnessed confirmations of it in *Providence*. He “is able to do exceeding abundantly,” &c. (2) God is the *gracious refuge* of those who trust in Him. Mere strength is not sufficient to inspire confidence. It may awaken apprehension and alarm. But God is as kind as He is strong. “Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.” Perowne : “Power without love is brutality, and love without power is weakness. Power is the strong foundation of love, and love is the beauty and the crown of power.” (3) God is the *righteous refuge* of those who trust in Him. “Thou renderest to every man according to his works.” He never does wrong to any of His creatures. He is the vindicator of the oppressed and injured. Here then we have a broad, immovable, and eternal ground for confidence in God.

CONCLUSION.—How unspeakably important is the object of the soul’s trust ! “We may make unsuccessful speculations in business, we may venture all we have on some ruinous enterprise, we may even put our lives in jeopardy and lose them ; still *all* may not be lost :—the *soul* may be safe. But if we trust the soul to something that will fail us at the day of judgment, then the loss

will be tremendous and irreparable.”
 “Trust in HIM at all times, ye people.”
 Psa. cxxv. 1, 2; Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

“Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.”

In what, or in whom, are we trusting?

GOD A REFUGE.

(Ver. 8.)

“God is a Refuge for us.”

I. Illustrate the interesting fact here declared.

Consider—

1. *The medium through which God is the refuge of His people.* The godly among the Israelites believed in the promised Messiah, and to them God was a refuge. It is through the work of Christ and by faith in Him that God is our refuge. Sin had created a breach between God and us. That breach is healed by the work of the Messiah. Through His mediation we have access to God.

2. *The perfections of His nature which qualify God to be the refuge of his people.* The power of God is engaged on their behalf. To have an Almighty friend for our refuge is an inestimable privilege. *Divine wisdom.* All our dangers and difficulties, all our enemies and their designs, are known unto God; and He is able to guard us from every danger, to lead us through every difficulty, and to frustrate the designs of all our foes. *Infinite goodness.* God is ready to afford His aid. Nahum 1-7. *Faithfulness.* On His promises and engagements we may safely rely. *Accessibility.* God is with us. He is a refuge ever near to us. *Immutability.* Creatures may be fickle and changeable, but God is unchangeable. *Self-*

existence and independence. Our best earthly friends may die, &c.; but God is an ever-living friend. (Deut. xxxiii. 27.)

3. *This interesting truth is confirmed by historical facts.* In all ages God has been the refuge of His people. The preservation of the Church is an illustration of this truth. It has been like a bush burning with fire, yet not consumed.

II. Consider the uses to which the subject may be applied.

1. *As connected with the events of Providence.* A wise and good and righteous God governs human affairs.

2. *As a source of consolation and joy to the Church.* The aspect of things may in many respects be such as to awaken our fears; but “God is a refuge for us.”

3. *As a comfort to individual believers.* In losses, family trials, bereavements, &c., “God is a refuge for us.”

LEARN—1. *The importance of trusting in God.* In troubles, difficulties, temptations, afflictions, and in death, trust in Him as your refuge.

2. *The importance of religion.* If you neglect religion you will have no refuge. But if you believe the Gospel, God will be your refuge. He will guide you by His counsel, and afterward receive you to glory.—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

THE POWER OF GOD.

(Verse 11.)

. Though the truth of God’s power is one of the most simple and elementary, though it is one taught by reason and nature as well as by revelation, it is one which is thoroughly learnt only after much Divine teaching and often many painful experiences.

I. Produce some proofs that men do not generally believe in the power of God.

1. *In the fact of sin.* By his every sin the sinner proclaims his disbelief of God’s power. He regards all His declarations of it as so many vain-glorious boastings. He cannot fulfil His threatenings, &c. Vain imaginations these.

2. *In open and avowed infidelity.* Miracles are impossible; and as the Gospel is full of miracles it must be re-

jected. Though God may have power, He has not omnipotent power.

3. *In the trust which is reposed in means altogether apart from God.* Is it not still true that oppression and robbery and increased riches are regarded as means which will be all-sufficient for the attainment of desired ends? When success comes we worship the instrument; and when distress visits us the last place which we think of, when we are seeking help and deliverance, is Jehovah's footstool.

4. *Distrust is another proof of disbelief in God's power.* All distrust implies not only a doubt of His faithfulness, or a questioning of His omniscience, but also a want of faith in His power. Behold the Israelites, &c., (Num. xi. 4; Ps. lxxviii. 19; Num. xiv. 1-4).

5. *In the fear of man* (Isa. li. 12, 13). Faith in God's power would overshadow the fear of man.

6. *One more proof is furnished by despair.* If despair relates to temporal things, the conclusion to which it has come is, that things have gone too far; &c. Or, if it relates to heavenly hopes, it reasons on similar grounds. These sins are too great for God to pardon; this torrent of corruption is too strong

for God to stem. . . . He may be mighty to save, but not omnipotent to save.

II. Offer some helps to faith in God's power.

1. That by which David encourages his faith in Ps. cxxi. "My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth." Is not He who made heaven and earth sufficient unto you?

2. *In the resurrection of Christ.* His tombstone was pressed down by the law, sin, death, and hell. Of all the tasks which His power ever had to overtake, this was assuredly the greatest; and if He failed not here, where elsewhere is it possible for Him to fail? Now we may proclaim Him omnipotent to save.

3. *The abiding of His grace in the heart of man* is a proof of the mighty power of God.

4. *And the continued existence of the Church of Christ* is one continued miracle, one living, present, impressive proof of the mighty power of God.

CONCLUSION.—*Believe in God's power*—(1) *for the pardon of your sins.* (2) *For grace to help in time of need.* His strength will be made perfect in your weakness.—A. F. Douglas (*Abridged from The Christian World.*)

PSALM LXIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah." Hengstenberg: "The wilderness of Judah is the whole wilderness towards the east of the tribe of Judah, bounded on the north by the tribe of Benjamin, stretching southward to the south-west end of the Dead Sea, eastward to the Dead Sea and the Jordan, and westward to the mountains of Judah. . . . This wilderness is not unfrequently designated simply *The wilderness*. In this wilderness David was often found when flying from Saul. In the same wilderness also he took refuge during the rebellion of Absalom. That he did so is self-evident, inasmuch as the road from Jerusalem to the Jordan leads through it: it is, moreover, expressly asserted in more than one passage in the Books of Samuel (2 Sam. xv. 23, 28; xvi. 2, 14; xvii. 16). We cannot refer our psalm to the time of Saul, because mention is expressly made of a king in verse 11. On the other hand, in favour of the time of Absalom; besides this reason we have a very marked reference in ver. 1, 'in a dry land, and is weary (עָרֵב) without water,' to 2 Sam. xvi. 14, 'And the king and all the people that were with him came weary (עָרִיב), and he rested there.' Comp. xvi. 2, according to which Ziba brought out, in the way, wine, 'that such as were faint in the wilderness might drink,' with the word עָרֵב in xvii. 2."

M. Henry: "As the sweetest of Paul's epistles were those that bore date out of a prison, so some of the sweetest of David's Psalms were those that were penned, as this was, in a wilderness." Donne: "The spirit and soul of the whole Book of Psalms is contracted into this psalm." Perowne: "This is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and touching psalms in the whole Psalter."

Homiletically, we see in this psalm, *the thirst, the satisfaction, and the anticipation of the godly soul.*

THE THIRST OF THE GODLY SOUL.

(Verses 1-4.)

Consider—

I. The nature of this thirst.

1. *It is a thirst for God.* "I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee," &c. In the second verse mention is made of God's "power and glory" as things which the Psalmist desired to see. In the A. V. the clauses of this verse are needlessly transposed. The Hebrew is: "Thus have I beheld Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory." The power and the glory are not the external pomp and splendour of public worship; but the communications of Divine grace, as manifested in the experience of the devout soul. The Psalmist longs for such communion with God as he had formerly enjoyed in the sanctuary. The thirst is not merely for the ordinances of religion, or for teaching concerning God, or even for His "power and glory;" but for *God Himself*. The thirst of the soul of man needs for its satisfaction that the soul shall be brought into vital and sympathetic relations with (1) *A Person*. Creeds and ordinances cannot satisfy the soul. (2) *A living Person*. Not one whose work and life and love are things of the past; but One who "is able to save, because He ever liveth," &c. (3) *A Divine Person*. One who is able satisfactorily to respond to its deepest yearnings, to help it to realise its loftiest aspirations, &c. One who ever liveth, who changeth not, &c. Only in God can the thirst of man's soul find satisfaction. (See on Ps. xlii. 1, 2).

2. *It is an intense thirst.* "I seek Thee earnestly" (not "early," as in the A. V. The verb שָׁחַד is not to be referred to the noun שָׁחַר = the dawn.

It means to "seek zealously," a "solicitous seeking"); "my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth" (Hengstenberg: "fainteth;" Moll: "languisheth") "for Thee." Each of the verbs indicates intense desire.

3. *It is a thirst of the entire man*

"My soul thirsteth, my flesh pineth for Thee." Soul and flesh are used to denote the whole man by his two principal parts. His whole being went out after God in fervent desire.

II. The occasion of this thirst. "In a dry and thirsty land where no water is."

1. These words are true *literally*. The wilderness of Judah where David was at this time, even in the neighbourhood of the Jordan, was a desert country (2 Sam. xvi. 2, 14).

2. These words are true *figuratively*. The desert was a picture of his condition. An exile from his throne and home, and from the sanctuary of the Lord. His own son and his most trusted counsellor, with a great host of his subjects, in armed rebellion against him. The circumstances in which he was placed led him to seek the Lord the more earnestly. Sorrow and trial often drive us the more closely to God. "When my blood flows like wine," says Beecher, "when all is ease and prosperity, when the sky is blue, and birds sing, and flowers blossom, and my life is an anthem moving in time and tune, then this world's joy and affection suffice. But when a change comes, when I am weary and disappointed, when the skies lower into a sombre night, when there is no song of bird, and the perfume of flowers is but their dying breath, when all is sunset and autumn, then I yearn for Him who sits with the summer of love in His soul, and feel that all earthly affection is but a glow-worm light, compared to that which blazes with such effulgence in the heart of God."

"Trials make the promise sweet,
Trials give new life to prayer."

III. The reason of this thirst. Why did David thus yearn for God? Two reasons are suggested—

1. *Because of his personal relation to God.* "Thou art my God." Jehovah was the God of the Poet, not only by creation, but by covenant; not only by

virtue of His claims, but also by the Poet's choice and consecration. There was a recognised and sacred relation between them, because of which it was right and appropriate that the Psalmist should seek God. Blessed are we if, "when the woes of life o'ertake" us, we can address ourselves to Him, saying, "O God, Thou art my God."

2. *Because of his exalted estimation of God.* David says that he longs for God, "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life." We regard "life" here as signifying more than mere existence; for the statement of the Psalmist implies that life is good; and that mere existence is not a boon is clear from Matt. xxvi. 24, and Rev. ix. 6. The Psalmist regarded the lovingkindness of God as better than a life of prosperity and pleasure. Having God's lovingkindness in his troubled life in the wilderness of Judah, David would esteem himself more blessed than in a life of pleasure in his palace at Jerusalem without it.

"Better than life itself, Thy love,
Dearer than all beside to me;
For whom have I in heaven above,
Or what on earth compared with Thee?"

IV. The relation of this thirst to the praise of God. "My lips shall praise Thee. Thus will I bless Thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in

Thy name." The lifting up of the hands was the attitude of worship, and symbolised the lifting up of the heart.

1. *In his sorrowful exile while thirsting for God, the Psalmist praises Him because of what He is in Himself, what He is to him, what He has done for him, and what He has promised to do for him.* In the bitterest experiences of life the devout heart will find matter and motive for praising God.

2. *In the delightful realisation of His presence, which he now seeks and anticipates, he will praise Him yet more.* The prospects of the godly soul should inspire the most joyous songs.

3. *In his whole life he will praise Him.* "I will bless Thee while I live." The entire life of the godly man should be grateful, reverent, and songful.

"My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures."

CONCLUSION.—How are you endeavouring to quench the thirst of your soul? Avoid the delusive promises of satisfaction held out by the world. At no earthly stream can you find the refreshing draught which you seek (Jer. ii. 13). "Jesus cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto ME and drink," &c.

SEEKING GOD.

(Verse 1.)

I. How should we seek God?

1. Intelligently. 2. Earnestly. 3. Constantly. 4. Hopefully.

II. Where should we seek Him?

1. In the closet. 2. In His Word. 3. In the ordinances.

III. When should we seek Him?

1. Early in life. 2. In advance of temporal things.

IV. Why should we seek Him?

1. He is the soul's life—"God."
2. His nature is communicative—"My God."—W. W. Wythe.

GOD'S POWER AND GLORY MANIFESTED IN THE SANCTUARY.

(Verse 2.)

In nothing is genuine piety more strikingly manifested than in the esteem for Divine ordinances. In the proper use of the public means of grace, communion with God is enjoyed, spirituality of mind is promoted, &c.

By the "glory" of God as displayed in the sanctuary we understand the glory of His character as developed in the principles of His moral government and in the method of redemption. The natural perfections of God are mani-

fested in the works of nature; His moral attributes are made known in His Word.

By the "power" of God as manifested in the sanctuary, we understand the spiritual energy which renders His Word effectual. Consider—

I. How God has manifested His glory in the sanctuary. 1. In the sanctuary *He has made known the moral excellences of His character—His holiness, mercy, wisdom, faithfulness.* 2. In the sanctuary *His people are favoured with communion with Him.* This privilege is enjoyed in *meditation, praise, and prayer.*

II. How God has manifested His power in the sanctuary. The means designed for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints are admirably adapted to the end for which they are designed; yet, through the depravity of mankind, they are inefficient unless accompanied with Divine influence. Thus the power of God is seen in the sanctuary—1. *When sinners are converted.* 2. *When believers are edified.*

III. The pleasure which the Divine

manifestations have afforded the people of God. In contemplating the Divine character, in communing with Him, and in witnessing displays of the Divine power, great has been the pleasure which they have enjoyed (Ps. xxvi. 8, and lxxxiv.).

IV. The desirableness of being favoured with the constant manifestations of the Divine power and glory. "My soul thirsteth for Thee," &c. If these things are so desirable, how may we attain them? 1. *Esteem Divine ordinances, attend with delight upon them, and pray that the blessing of God may attend them.* 2. *Pray fervently for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.* His agency is indispensable, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. *How great is the criminality of those who neglect Divine ordinances.* 2. *Those who neglect them need not wonder if they are not converted.* 3. *How great is the privilege of having a place in the sanctuary of God.* 4. *What will it be to behold His power and glory in heaven!*—(Abridged from an unpublished MS.)

THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF GOD BETTER THAN THE LIFE OF MAN.

(Verse 3.)

"Thy lovingkindness is better than life."

These words imply—

I. That life is good. This could not be said of mere existence. Existence may be an evil—(1.) Because of its miserableness. In his great sufferings, Job felt his existence to be a curse (Job. iii. Comp. Matt. xxvi. 24; Rev. ix. 6). (2.) Because of its perniciousness. From the holy Word we learn that there are certain beings in the universe whose characters are utterly depraved, whose aim in life is utterly destructive, and whose influence is only and continually malignant (John viii. 44; 1 Pet. v. 8). Their existence is good neither for themselves nor for others. It is a bane and blight in the universe. According to the tone and teaching of the Scriptures a life of misery or a life of sin is not to be accounted life

at all, but only a form of death. David thought of a life of peace at home, in secure possession of the throne, and in the enjoyment of Divine ordinances; and he affirmed that the lovingkindness of God was better than such a life, and his statement clearly implies that life itself when it is not blighted by sin or sorrow is a good thing. It is so—

1. *Because of its great faculties.* How remarkable are the powers of recollection, reflection, anticipation, ratiocination, imagination, affection, with which human life is endowed! How great its power of usefulness!

2. *Because of its great capacities.* How immense is man's capacity for enjoyment! The streams of delight from which he drinks are countless and inexhaustible. The whole endless future is before him for the satisfaction and development of his capacities. He was

created in the image of the ever-blessed God, and, therefore, capable of participating in His peace, joy, &c.

3. *Because of its conditions and circumstances.* The world in which at present we spend our life is full of interest, instruction, utility, beauty. It is a great treasury, exhibition, school, temple. Heaven, to which we look forward as the scene of our life in the future, is of unspeakable glory, &c. Truly life is good. But the Psalmist states—

II. That the lovingkindness of God is better than life even at its best. “Thy lovingkindness is better than life.” It is so—

1. *Because all that is good in life flows from the lovingkindness of God.* The powers and capacities of human life, and all that is pleasing and precious in its circumstances and conditions, are streams from the fountain of the Divine lovingkindness. “All my springs are in Thee.” “With Thee is the fountain of life.” All that is true, useful, good, and beautiful in the universe springs from the infinite grace of God.

2. *Because while much that is good and pleasant in life is transient and in-*

termittent, the lovingkindness of God is constant and abiding. In life joyous hours are succeeded by sorrowful ones. Like David, we pass from peace and home and the sanctuary of God into the exile and weariness of “the wilderness of Judah.” Fairest prospects soon fade. But the lovingkindness of God is eternal, unchangeable, &c. It is “that good part which shall not be taken away from” the man who trusts in God.

3. *The lovingkindness of God sanctifies even the pains and trials of life, so that by means of them life is enriched and blest.* (Rom. v. 3-5; viii. 28; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18; Jas. i. 2, 3, 12; 1 Pet. i. 6-9).

4. *The lovingkindness of God is the crown and glory of life.* The enjoyment of it makes life’s fairest scenes more divinely beautiful; its most precious experiences more precious. It ennobles the pleasures of life, it consecrates its friendships, it sanctifies its successes, &c. It is the heaven of the soul.

CONCLUSION.—1. *What is the character of your life?*

2. *What is your estimate of the Divine lovingkindness?*

THE SATISFACTION OF THE GODLY SOUL.

(Verses 5-8.)

The Psalmist passes from thirst to the assurance of satisfaction in God. And in these verses we see the nature of this satisfaction. He found satisfaction—

I. In the provisions of God. “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.” The provisions of God for the spiritual needs of men are frequently represented in the Scriptures as a sumptuous feast. David looked forward confidently to the realisation of spiritual satisfaction and delight.

1. *The Divine provisions are spiritual.* “My soul shall be satisfied.” Satisfied with delightful experiences, exalted and blessed fellowship, ennobling occupations, enrapturing prospects, &c. Pardon, communion with God, work for God, hope of holiness and heaven, &c.

2. *The Divine provisions are rich.* “Marrow and fatness.” The provisions of the Gospel are like a “feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.” Its blessings are not only useful but delightful; not only healthful, but pleasant.

3. *The Divine provisions are abundant.* The Psalmist was assured of satisfaction. “My soul shall be satisfied.” Whatever God gives He gives abundantly. Pardon (Psa. cxxxvi. 5, 15; ciii. 8; Isa. lv. 7); Redemption (Ps. cxxx. 7). Grace (2 Cor. ix. 8).

II. In meditation on God. “I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches.”

1. *The nature of this exercise.* “Remember, . . . meditate.” Recollection

presented the doings and sayings of God, and then the mind meditated upon them, and upon Him. Meditation is not mere reverie, but musing, or fixed and continuous thought. One of the most important mental exercises, especially in relation to spiritual life and progress. And we fear that it is also a most neglected exercise.

2. *The subject of this exercise.* "Remember Thee, . . . meditate on Thee." The grandest, most glorious subject that is possible. Meditation on God is (1) *humbling*, inasmuch as it reveals our feebleness, insignificance, sinfulness. (2) *Spiritualising*, inasmuch as it withdraws us from the material and worldly into association with the spiritual and Divine. (3) *Transforming*, inasmuch as we become like unto those with whom in thought and feeling we dwell (2 Cor. iii. 18).

3. *The season of this exercise.* "On my bed, in the night watches." Night is favourable to meditation on God and spiritual things, (1) Because of its *darkness*. Material things are then hidden from our view and spiritual things appear with reality and vividness. (2) Because of its *stillness*. The noise and tumult of the day ill accord with meditation on spiritual and Divine themes. The quiet of the night harmonises with and aids such meditation. Great are the advantages of meditation like this.

III. In the protection of God. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

1. This protection is *well assured*. It is guaranteed both by God's promise and by man's experience. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore," &c. 2. This protection is *perfect*. "In the shadow of Thy wings." (See the *Hom. Com.* on Ps. lvii. 1.) 3. This protection is *joy-inspiring*. "Will I rejoice." (See the outline below on this verse.)

IV. In the sustentation of God. "My soul followeth hard after Thee,

Thy right hand upholdeth me." In the support of the godly soul two important things are here brought into clear view :

1. *Man's trust.* "My soul followeth hard after Thee." More correctly : "'My soul cleaveth to Thee.' Hengstenberg : "'My soul depends on Thee.' In ver. 8, there are the mutual relations between the believing soul and the Lord : it depends on Him, and cleaves to Him, like a bur to a coat, and He takes hold of it, and holds it up with His powerful right hand, so that it does not sink into the abyss of destruction and despair." Our business is to depend upon God, by faith to cleave to Him with the utmost tenacity.

2. *God's power.* "Thy right hand upholdeth me." The right hand is the instrument of skill and strength. With infinite wisdom and almighty power God sustains the souls that trust in Him. This "representation of the mutual affection and reciprocal relation of God and His servant" is both beautiful and encouraging.

V. In the celebration of the praise of God. "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips." The satisfaction of his soul the godly man seeks to express in praise to God. David resolves to praise God—

1. *Vocally.* "My mouth shall praise." By so doing he would express the praise of his own heart, and excite the hearts and voices of others to praise God.

2. *Joyfully.* "With joyful lips." To David, praising God was pleasurable employment. He viewed it not as a duty, but as a delightful privilege.

CONCLUSION. — Here then is satisfaction for the thirsting soul. In the protection, provision, and support of God, and by our meditation and trust and praise of Him, our spiritual anxieties may be calmed, our wants supplied, our joy inspired, &c. Turn thee, thou thirsting soul, from the shallow and muddy streams of earth to the clear and deep river of heavenly grace ; and drink, and be for ever blessed (John iv. 13, 14).

THE ARGUMENT OF EXPERIENCE.

(Verse 7.)

These words speak alike of *sorrow* and *joy*. We need *help*. We can experience *joy*. Thus read, the text is true to life.

In commencing fresh eras in life the Christian feels that there will be nothing really *new*. The forms and dresses of things will alter; but the pensive features of sorrow and the open face of joy will be there too. The servant of God has an experience. God has been his "refuge and strength." What words, then, can I select as the basis of an argument from experience more appropriate than these—"Because Thou hast been mine help," &c.

I. The rejoicing is reasonable.—"Because." It is not founded on *promise* alone (though if *that* be God's, never will it be broken), but upon *past experience*. And upon this experience, as it divides itself into thousandfold circumstances. Oh, what seasons there have been! &c.

II. The rejoicing is personal.—"My help." That does not exclude others. Every soldier in the army lifts up his answering Amen. Who can explain that strange mystery of individuality? At the heart of each of us there are unspoken mysteries of solitude. Even a child lives in a tiny world of its own. . . . "My help." "I am not alone. God is my help."

III. The rejoicing is real. There is joy. Something more than rest or quiescent peace. The soul was made for delight as well as for discipline and duty. Nay, rather shall I not say, for gladness *in* discipline and duty? *In Christ* there is a fountain of blessedness springing up unto everlasting life. For us all to-day there may be joy in the Saviour, the joy of forgiveness through the redeeming sacrifice of the cross, the joy of a new life which sanctifies suffering and sweetens toil, the joy of immortal life through the resurrection.

IV. The rejoicing is restful. Therefore under the shadow of Thy wings."

This is beautiful. You and I can make no such protection by machine-made covering for our beds, as a bird makes for its young. No! Rain and snow cannot pierce those shadowing wings! How roof-like their setting! How softly the inner covering makes all complete; resistance in the feathers without, down in the wings within. Can anything better represent the idea of *security* than this? of *rest* than this? of *comfort* than this? for it is the bird's beating heart that is the warm glow of the nest; and it is God's great heart of love in Christ that is near to us—so very near, taking our manhood up into God, clothing Himself in our nature, that He might succour and help us in temptation as well as in grief. . . .

. . . . The Psalmist had been meditating. Quiet hours bring quiet memories. He reminds us of the still night, in which the memory is set free, and unfolding its wings in the silence, broods over the pilgrim way. Yes, there—and there—and there, the word of the Lord was tried, and the promise of the Lord was tested, and the deliverance of the Lord was vouchsafed, and lo, there are memorial stones all along the way! "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me," &c. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good," &c.

V. The rejoicing is prophetic. "Will I rejoice." So we anticipate life's future with entire and holy confidence. What *can* that future bring with it that our gracious Saviour cannot prepare us for, and order for our good? (Rom. viii. 31-39).

This, then, is to be written on our banners, "In the shadow of Thy wings I will rejoice." Change and trouble must come to us all. But God's right hand will uphold us all. "Because Thou hast been mine help," &c.—W. M. STATHAM (*Abridged from The Christian World Pulpit.*)

THE ANTICIPATION OF THE GODLY SOUL.

(Verses 9-11.)

The Poet here looks forward confidently to the defeat and destruction of his enemies, and to his own exaltation because of his deliverance. The verses present to us a triple contrast.

I. A contrast of character.

1. *The malignant and mendacious.* The rebels were animated by a most cruel and malicious feeling against the king. They were as false as they were malicious. They spake lies. They delighted in lies. (See on Psa. lxii. 3, 4.)

2. *The religious and truthful.* "Every one that sweareth by Him." M. Henry: "That is, by the blessed name of God, and not by any idol (Deut. vi. 13), and then it means all good people, that make a sincere and open profession of God's name." Swearing by Him indicates truthfulness also. They appeal to Him as the true God, the God who delights in truth.

This great contrast of character still exists amongst men in this world. The false and the true, the good and the evil are still here.

. A contrast of pursuit.

1. *The rebels sought the life of the king.* "They seek my soul." Though the words "to destroy it" must be applied to the rebels; still it is true that they sought to take the life of David. The objects for which they were striving were utterly cruel and base.

2. *The king sought his own salvation and God's glory.* They thirsted for the life of another; he thirsted for God. They looked forward to seizing his throne and kingdom; he to grateful, joyful, lifelong worship of God.

Of what character are our pursuits? Will they bear the searching scrutiny of truth and honesty?

III. A contrast of destiny. 1. *The mendacious shall be silenced, and the truthful exalted.*—"Every one that sweareth by Him shall glory; but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped." Hypocrisies, shams, false-

hoods, may live long, as life appears to us; but they must perish; and they who utter them will come to silence and shame. Truth cannot perish, but must grow and advance to splendid triumph. The truth-seeker and the truth-speaker will have abundant reason for exultation.

2. *The malignant shall be utterly and ignominiously destroyed, and the religious shall have cause for rejoicing.* "And they to (their) destruction will they seek my soul; they shall go into the depths of the earth. They shall be given over to the power of the sword; a portion for jackals shall they be." The jackals are the scavengers of the East. They prey on dead bodies; and assemble in troops on battle-fields to feast on the slain.

What a terrible fulfilment the words of the Poet had in the case of Absalom, Ahithophel, and twenty thousand of the rebels! In seeking the life of the king they brought upon themselves dread destruction. A fearful doom awaits all persistent workers of iniquity. "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." "The wicked shall be turned into hell." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." They "shall be punished with everlasting destruction," &c.

"But the king shall rejoice in God." The destruction of the rebels was the salvation of the king. And his rejoicing by reason thereof was religious—"in God." Those who truly trust in God shall come forth from the trials and conflicts of life "more than conquerors" through Him.

CONCLUSION.—*How unspeakably important is individual character!* Our character expresses itself in our pursuits, and determines our destiny. "As righteousness tendeth to life; so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." *Only through Christ can man attain righteousness of character. What is your character?*

PSALM LXIV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription. "To the chief Musician:" see Introduction to Ps. lvii. "A Psalm of David." The structure and character of the psalm confirm the title as to its Davidic authorship. The allusions in the psalm are so general that they might have been used by the poet on many occasions in his life; so that we are unable to determine the particular occasion of its composition. Homiletically we see in the psalm—

THE PRAYER AND PREDICTION OF THE GOOD MAN CONCERNING
HIS WICKED ENEMIES.

We have here—

I. Prayer for preservation from wicked enemies (vers. 1-6). Consider—

1. *The description of the enemies.* This the poet has given at some length. (1.) *Their character.* "The wicked, . . . the workers of iniquity." The words indicate positive and unmistakable wickedness of character, and terrible constancy and activity in evil doing. (2.) *Their object.* It is clearly implied in ver. 1 that they aimed at the life of David. "Preserve my life from fear of the enemy." They sought to kill him. This was true of Saul and those who aided him in his persecutions of David. It was true also of Absalom and the rebels. (3.) *Their weapons.* "Who whet their tongue like a sword," &c. Conant: "Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword, have fitted their arrow—bitter speech, to shoot," &c. Slander is the weapon of which David makes mention here. It was not by any means the only weapon used against him, but it was one which evidently caused him acute suffering. The figures here used to set it forth we have met with before. (See on Ps. lii. 2; lvii. 4; lix. 7; and, for that of the fixed arrows lviii. 7.) (4.) *Their method.* This included (a.) *Conspiracy.* "The secret counsel of the wicked, . . . they commune of laying snares privily, . . . both the inward thought of every one, and the heart is deep." In confidential council they formed their secret plans by which they hoped to effect their wicked designs. They were deliberate, secret, methodical. (b.) *Tumultuousness.* "The insurrection of the workers of iniquity." Or, "The tumultuous

throng of evil doers." The secret counsel led to the exciting of the passions of evil men against the Psalmist. (c.) *Secret and sudden attack.* "They shoot in secret at the perfect" (or, upright); "suddenly they shoot at him and fear not." The Psalmist had not to meet manly foes in fair encounter. His enemies were like robbers or murderers who waylay the defenceless traveller in a secret place, and suddenly, when he deems himself secure, make their attack upon him. And in doing this they were fearless. They were unseen of men; and they regarded not God. They had no fear of God, no dread of His judgment. (d.) *Persistent effort.* "They encourage themselves in an evil matter," &c. Hengstenberg: "They strengthen for themselves an evil plan." Perowne: "They take every means to secure their object, follow it up resolutely." (e.) *Inventiveness.* "They search out iniquities," &c. Conant: "They search for iniquities; we are ready (say they); a device searched out!" They invented or contrived iniquitous plans; and when they succeeded in so doing, they made their boast of it.

This description of the enemies of the Psalmist impresses us with two things:

First: *The terrible perversion and depravation of their nature.* How fearful the misuse of the powers of thought, invention, action, persistence!

Second: *The alarming criminality of their character and conduct.* How tremendous is their guilt!

2. *The prayer of the Psalmist.* "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer," &c. (1.) *Its object.* "Preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked,"

&c. The Psalmist was conscious of his exposedness to danger, and of his inability to protect or deliver himself; and he seeks the protection of the Most High. He asks for preservation not simply from peril, but from alarm or terror. God can preserve in the midst of the greatest dangers, and inspire the soul with the most exultant confidence. (2.) *Its confidence.* "Thou wilt hide me from the secret counsel," &c. Barnes: "There is both an implied prayer that this might be done, and a confident belief that it would be done." The prayer was not the cry of despair, but the expression of trustful desire.

In the foregoing we have an *illustration of the foes, and the resource of the godly soul in danger.* We have spiritual enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are aiming at the ruin of our souls. They seek to accomplish this by various means—by subtlety and by strength, by persistent efforts and by sharp and sudden attacks, &c. We have neither the skill nor the strength successfully to cope with them. Our need of Divine preservation and help is great and constant. Our safety is in believing prayer to God.

II. Prediction of the destruction of wicked enemies (vers. 7–10). The Psalmist utters his confident expectation that God would destroy his foes. In so doing he mentions—

1. *The Author of their destruction.* "God shall shoot at them," &c. Let us not misunderstand or misuse the word "author" here. The meritorious cause of their destruction is in themselves. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." But in the administration of His righteous government God visits them with the judgments which their sins have deserved. He smites them justly with the punishment they have merited.

2. *Its instruments.* "With an arrow: suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves." "The arrow of God here corresponds to the arrow of the wicked in vers. 3 and 4." And their tongue by which they sought to injure others shall prove the instrument

of their own destruction. God destroys the wicked with their own weapons. (Comp. Ps. vii. 15, 16; ix. 15, 16.)

3. *Its manner.* "Suddenly shall they be wounded." When they think that they are about to succeed in their evil plans, on what they deem the very eve of their triumph, the Divine judgment bursts upon them. (Comp. 1 Thess. v. 3.)

4. *Its effect.* (1.) *Upon the companions of the wicked.* "All that see them shall flee away," so that they may not be involved in their ruin (Num. xvi. 34). (2.) *Upon men in general.* (a.) It would lead to some knowledge of the Divine government. "They shall wisely consider of His doing." Both Hengstenberg and Moll render this: "And understand His work." They shall see that the judgment is not the result of chance or human agency; but the work of a just and Holy God. (b.) It would inspire awe. "All men shall fear." Barnes: "Judgments, punishments, wrath are adapted and designed to make a deep impression on mankind. On this principle, the final punishment of the wicked will make a deep and salutary impression on the universe for ever." (c.) It would incite to a declaration of the hand of God. "Men shall declare the work of God." "A man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth." (3.) *Upon the upright.* "The righteous shall be glad in the Lord," &c. (a.) It inspires their joy. "Glad in the Lord;" because of the vindication of the government of God, and the certainty of their own safety. (b.) It increases their confidence. "Shall trust in Him;" because His doings furnish additional grounds and encouragements to confidence. (c.) It enlarges their triumph. "All the upright in heart shall glory." Their soul shall make its boast in the Lord. And their joy and trust and triumph are all religious—not vindictive, or revengeful, or self-conceited; but religious—"in the Lord."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the wicked take warning.* 2. *Let the godly take en-*

couragement. Be not dismayed in the struggles of the spiritual life. However many or mighty, however subtle or skilful our enemies may be, we shall

triumph over them. "Through God we shall do valiantly; for He shall tread down our enemies."

OMNISCIENCE IGNORED.

(Verse 5. "They say, who shall see them?")

I. This notion has great influence upon the conduct of man.

It is worthy of consideration, as indicating the nature of evil, that it finds such a notion convenient and necessary.

Offenders against man retire to the dark when they mean to perpetrate their evil deeds. The murderer, the thief, &c. Concealment is the helpmeet of wrong.

Because they sometimes, perhaps often, escape the most watchful human eyes, they fancy it possible to escape the eye of God.

They would have no interest whatever in reaching this conclusion if they never wished to do anything wrong. The sinner persuades himself of two or three things: he has gained his end; he has escaped observation; he has avoided the punishment. It is not necessary that all this be formulated. It is sufficient if the mind accustoms itself to question whether God sees. The sinner will take advantage of a doubt.

II. This notion is utterly untruthful and delusive. Whether our sinful deeds are seen by man or not, there is One to whom they are open as the day. If there is a God at all, this must be so. If you persuade yourself that God does not see, you persuade yourself that God is not. That part of the universe which God does not know, has no God. He who does not know everything is limited: therefore he is not God.

But you cannot see Him. When

you cannot see a man you infer that he is not present. Because you cannot see God you infer that He is not present. Thus you require that which would argue Him nothing more than a man after all. The spirituality of the Divine nature makes it possible for Him to be everywhere and see everything.

III. God has often in human experiences, shown the delusiveness of this notion, and the time is fixed for the complete demonstration of its delusiveness. 1. Character is often seen through by man. We may be deceived as to individual acts. But our view of a man's general character is usually correct. 2. Retribution often follows man's deeds in the present world. It followed and overtook Joseph's brethren, Achan and Saul. 3. The future state will show that God saw. At the judgment day the books will be opened. What is written there will prove that sin was seen. Hell will be an everlasting proof.

CONCLUSION.—Sinner, God sees you: has seen you all along. Be warned! Christian, 1. Be encouraged and comforted by the thought that God sees. He sees the good and their goodness. 2. Be more constantly influenced by this thought. (1.) Let it restrain from sin. (2.) Let it stimulate to holy obedience and earnest work.—*J. R., in The Pulpit Analyst.*

THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY.

(Verse 10.)

We have here—

I. A description of character. "The righteous, . . . the upright in heart."

1. *Righteousness of character.* Not

merely correctness of external conduct, but uprightness of heart—moral excellence of principle and disposition and tendency. But how is this to be attained? "There is none righteous, no,

not one." Man is prone to sin, his heart is prone to crooked ways, &c. In the sight of God, "all have sinned." But the sinful may be made righteous by faith in the righteousness and love of God manifested in Jesus Christ—or, more correctly, by faith in Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God and Saviour of men. The godly in pre-Christian ages attained unto righteousness through faith. And for us to-day righteousness of character is attainable only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. iii. 20–28.)

2. *Righteousness of conduct.* "The upright in heart" will be the upright in action. "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him. . . . Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous." But how shall we acquire the strength to do this? We have it not in ourselves. "To will is present with me, but to perform that which is good is not." In the work, and death, and life of our Lord we have not simply an atonement, but an inspiration also. Through Him we obtain both pardon and power, both forgiveness and "grace to help in time of need." "When I am weak, then am I strong." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

II. **A declaration of privilege.** "The righteous shall be glad," &c. Here are three privileges—

1. *Joy.* "Shall be glad in the Lord." Notice concerning this joy, (1.) *Its cause.* (a.) Because of the vindication of the government of God. This was a reason of the gladness spoken of by the Psalmist. "The Lord reigneth." The world is neither anarchic, nor governed by the strongest temporal power, nor by chance, nor by Satan; but by God. (b.) Because under His government the interests of the righteous are secure. Those of the Psalmist had seemed extremely imperilled; but God had overthrown the wicked, &c. God governs the world so as to secure the safety and blessedness of His loyal subjects. He is on their side. (Rom.

viii. 31; 1 Pet. iii. 13). (2.) *Its character.* "Glad in the Lord." The rejoicing of the righteous is religious. It is not vindictive, or revengeful, or self-confident. It proceeds from God as its source, and it flows to Him as its end. It originated in His doings; it expresses itself in His praise. "In the Lord" how abundant are the reasons and how wide the scope for joy!

2. *Trust.* "And shall trust in Him." In the case of the Psalmist, God's judgment upon the wicked (1.) supplied additional evidence of His trustworthiness; and (2.) was especially fitted to encourage trust in Him in time of darkness, trial, and peril. He had watched the progress of the wicked enemies of the Psalmist, and at the moment when they seemed about to leap into triumph, He had interposed. His interposition carried irresistible ruin to them, and complete salvation to His people. What He had done He would in like circumstances and conditions do again. How great are our encouragements to trust Him! *His goodness and wisdom and power, His purposes, promises and performances, all are charged with incitements to confidence in Him!*

3. *Triumph.* "Shall glory." Every man has some object in which he glories or boasts. One glories in his wisdom, another in his might, another in his riches, another in his honours. All these are mistaken, &c. (Jer. ix. 23, 24). "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." He whose confidence is reposed in God has the most excellent reasons for exultation. He is the greatest Being, the best Being. He has pledged Himself to defend and save those who trust in Him. He cannot fail.

CONCLUSION.—1. *The portion of the righteous at its worst is immeasurably superior to that of the wicked at its best.* 2. *By prayer and faith, by consecration and effort, let us seek to make that portion ours.*

PSALM LXV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "*A Psalm and song of David.*" Or, "*A Psalm of David, a song.*" See Introduction to Ps. xlviii. In the Psalm itself there are evidences, which Hengstenberg points out, that it is the production of David. The Psalm was probably composed as a psalm of thanksgiving for the blessings of the harvest; in anticipation of an approaching harvest, as Hengstenberg suggests, or on the completion of harvest, as Hitzig suggests.

Homiletically the Psalmist sets forth, *Aspects of Divine worship* (vers. 1-4); *Manifestations of Divine power* (vers. 5-8); and *The Beneficent activity of God in Nature* (vers. 9-13).

ASPECTS OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

(Verses 1-4.)

We see here—

I. Worship in its source. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach," &c. God is the Author of all true worship.

1 *He grants the opportunity of worship.* The revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, the institution of religious ordinances and of Christian ministries, the fixing our lot in a land and age of Christian privileges—these are all from Him.

2. *He inspires the disposition to worship.* All reverent feeling, holy desire, and devout aspiration in us, are the result of the gracious influences of his Holy Spirit. The cause—the efficient reason—why any man worships his Maker at all, is to be found in God Himself. Whatever there is of good in us, and whatever of good belongs to us, proceeds from Him. "All my springs are in Thee." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," &c. The source of all true worship is God Himself.

II. Worship in its object. "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God," &c. As God is the Author of all true worship, so He is also its End. Worship is offered to Him here—

1. *As the Hearer of prayer.* "O Thou that hearest prayer." How sublime and beautiful and true is this appellation as addressed to God! His ear is ever open to the cries of the sinful, the suffering, the sorrowful, the dying. (See an outline on ver. 2, below.)

2. *As the Pardoner of sin.* "Iniquities prevail against me; our trans-

gressions, Thou shalt purge them away." God is praised here because of His goodness in the forgiveness of sin. There are two points here. (1) *The greatness of human sin.* The iniquities of the Psalmist are represented as overpowering him with a superior hostile force. Man cannot contend with his sins. He cannot answer for them, or atone for them. "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

(2) *The greatness of Divine forgiveness.* "Thou shalt purge them away." God pardons the most heinous transgressions (Isa. i. 18);—the most numerous transgressions (Ps. ciii. 3; cxxx. 7; Isa. lv. 7); and He pardons them completely (Ps. ciii. 12; Isa. xxxviii. 17; Mic. vii. 19).

3. *As the Satisfier of the soul.* "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." Man has great needs. In addition to forgiveness he requires cleansing, support, guidance, love, hope, &c. God alone can supply these needs. The goodness of His house all flows from Him. Religious ministries and ordinances are worthless apart from His blessing. "With Thee is the fountain of life," &c. In God the soul finds complete satisfaction and blessedness. To God as the Hearer of prayer, the Forgiver of sins, the Satisfier of souls, human worship should be addressed.

III. Worship in its nature. It is here represented as consisting in—

1. *Submission to the will of God.* "Praise waiteth for Thee, O God," is

not a correct rendering. Conant translates: "To Thee belong submission, praise, O God." Hengstenberg: "Thou art praised in the silence, O God." Margin: "Praise is silent for Thee, O God." Moll: "To Thee is silence (resignation), praise, O God." Resignation to the Divine will, the silence of the heart before God, is a duty which we owe to Him, and is worship of the very highest character. To trust Him in darkness and mystery, to bow loyally to His will when its dispensations to us are painful, to exclaim in the supreme agony of life, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,"—surely this is the very highest worship that we can render to Him.

2. *Celebration of the praise of God.* The Poet represents praise as belonging to God; and it constitutes one of the chief elements of worship. God is praised by His people because of what He has done and is ever doing for them, because of what He is to them, and because of what He is in Himself.

3. *The fulfilment of our vows to God.* "Unto Thee shall the vow be performed." There seems to be two ideas here: (1) Gratitude for benefits received. God had blessed His people by gracious doings for them and generous gifts to them, and they thankfully remember these things, and recognise their own obligation by reason of them. (2) Faithfulness in keeping promises which they had made. Formerly they had uttered their vows, and now they resolve to perform them. These, then, are some of the elements of worship—hearty submission to God's will, celebration of His praise, and performance of our vows to Him.

IV. *Worship in its locality.* "In Zion, . . . in Thy courts, . . . Thy house, . . . Thy holy temple." Zion

was the scene of special Divine manifestation. It was authoritatively appointed the chief place for the worship of Jehovah. "The Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation." Our Lord Jesus Christ is now the true Zion. Every one who worships God, believing in Christ as the Divine Mediator, will find acceptance and blessing in so doing. Through Him the devout heart may worship God anywhere (John iv. 21–24).

V. *Worship in its extent.* "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." Here is a declaration that—

1. *The needy shall worship the All-sufficient.* The use of the word "flesh" here to denote man, indicates his weakness and need. Man is an entirely dependent creature—frail, feeble, and needy. God is the inexhaustible Fountain of life, strength, and blessing: to Him needy man shall come for supply.

2. *All the needy shall worship the All-sufficient.* "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." Hengstenberg: "God is rich not only for a few, but for all: all to whom the name of man belongs come to Him, in order to draw from His inexhaustible fountain." (See the Outline on ver. 2, below.)

VI. *Worship in its influence.* "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest," &c. They are blessed inasmuch as their prayers are heard, their sins are pardoned, and their souls are satisfied in God. All the spiritual joys and blessings of Divine grace are theirs. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." The worship of God spiritualises and ennobles the worshipper—transforms him into the Divine image. Worship is heaven.

A GREAT FACT, PRIVILEGE, AND PROSPECT.

(Verse 2.)

We have in this verse—

I. *A glorious fact.* God hears prayer. This fact may be proved—

1. *From the nature of God.* A

Being of infinite intelligence must hear every request that is made to Him. A Being of infinite kindness must hear with regard—with consideration and

favour. A Being, in whom infinite resources are joined to infinite kindness, must answer.

2. *From the teachings of Scripture.* "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee," &c. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for," &c. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

3. *From the experiences of believers.* Moses (Exod. xxxii. 11-14, 31-35; Num. xi. 1-3); Elijah (1 Kings xvii. 17-24; xviii. 42-45); Elisha (2 Kings iv. 28-36); the Psalmist's (Ps. cxvi. 1, 2; *et al.*); Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 1-8); Daniel (Dan. ix. 20-23); the early Christians praying for Peter (Acts xii. 1-17); innumerable instances since; and thousands of persons to-day.

II. A precious privilege. We may come unto God in prayer.

1. *It is a great privilege to be permitted to unburden our heart to a Being of perfect wisdom and goodness and sympathy.* The heart's highest, holiest joy, and its most secret and sacred sorrow, we may tell with confidence to Him. And the mere telling of such experiences to such a Being will afford relief.

2. *How much greater is the privilege when that Being has power to aid and bless.* Such power has God. In perplexity, in want, in sorrow, in affliction, in spiritual distress, &c., we may come

to the all-kind and all-sufficient Friend. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

III. An inspiring prospect. "Unto Thee shall all flesh come."

1. *The weak and needy shall approach unto the infinite Source of strength and blessing.* Man's frailty and need are indicated by the word "flesh." Man is weak and poor; God is almighty and unsearchable in riches; to Him shall man come, and be strengthened, blessed, &c.

2. *All the weak and needy shall come unto the infinite Source of strength and blessing.* "Unto Thee shall all flesh come." All the helpless and poor shall come to God with prayers and thanksgivings. He is "the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea." Our faith in the approach of all men to God in prayer rests upon considerations such as these: (1) There is a correlation between God's resources and man's needs; between man's dependence and God's all-sufficiency. (2) Divinely-appointed means are in operation for bringing needy men to the wealthy God. The ministries of nature, providence, and the Gospel are all designed and fitted to lead men to the all-sufficiency of God. (3) The Word of God announces the approach of all men to the Hearer of prayer (Ps. lxxii. 8-17; Isa. xlv. 23, 24; Rom. xiv. 11).

CONCLUSION.—1. *Appreciate this privilege.* 2. *Seek to extend it to others.* Announce it to others. Persuade them to avail themselves of it.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF COMMUNION WITH GOD.

(Verse 4.)

I. Make a few explanatory remarks on the several particulars implied and expressed in the text.

1. *The words imply that the public means of grace ought to be viewed as a distinguished privilege.* "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest," &c.

2. *In the public means of grace communion with God may be enjoyed.* "And causest to approach unto Thee," &c.

To approach unto God is to enjoy communion with Him. We may approach unto God: (1) by prayer through the mediation of Jesus Christ; (2) with sentiments of thanksgiving and praise; (3) in receiving instruction from His Word; and (4) under the most endearing and interesting relations in the ordinances which He has appointed—as Father, &c. Do we know by experience

the blessedness of thus approaching unto God?

3. *The house of God is here represented as the habitation of His people.* "That he may dwell in Thy courts." The good man is not an occasional visitor of the house of God, but a resident. The godly are diligent in their attendance there; they embrace every opportunity, &c.

4. *Special advantages which afford rich pleasure and solid satisfaction are experienced by those who dwell in the house of the Lord and enjoy communion with Him.* "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple." The satisfaction and pleasure arise (1) from its being the dwelling-place of God. He dwells there as a king in his courts—as God in His

temple. (2) From the communications of the Divine favour. They are satisfied with His goodness in the pardon of sins, in the bestowment of eternal life, &c.

II. Improve the subject with a few reflections.

1. *How great is the value of religious privileges.*

2. *How important is it to improve our privileges.*

3. *How great are the advantages which attend the improvement of the means of grace.*

4. *How great is the sin of those who slight the means of grace.*

5. *How important it is that those who have slighted the means of grace should repent and reform.*—Abridged from an unpublished MS.

MANIFESTATIONS OF DIVINE POWER.

(Verses 5-8.)

Notice—

I. The sphere of the manifestations of the Divine power. It is represented by the Psalmist as manifested—

1. *In nature* (vers. 6, 7). We have it here (1) *Establishing the most stable things*: "Who by His strength setteth fast the mountains, girded with power." The mountains are the most secure, abiding, and unchangeable things in nature. Generations come and go, but the mountains remain. Cities arise and flourish, decay, and pass away; but the mountains continue, and apparently change not. Empires are founded and fortified, assaulted and overthrown; but the ancient and firm-set mountains move not and change not. The Almighty, as a master workman girded with power, firmly founded and securely keeps them. Their stability is an abiding and impressive witness to His omnipotence. (2) *Controlling the most restless and tumultuous things*. "Who stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves." How restless is the sea! How fierce and furious and terrible when it is agitated by storm! But His voice can curb it even in its wildest moods, can reduce its mountainous billows to gentle

undulations, can hush its roaring thunders into soft rippling cadences. (Comp. Ps. cvii. 29; Matt. viii. 26.) Thus nature is ever witnessing to the almighty power of God.

2. *In human society*. "Who stilleth the tumult of the peoples." Perowne: "The sea and nations are mentioned together, the one being so often used as an image of the other." Luther: "Like as He stilled Pharaoh with all his people, when he stormed and raged against Israel, as if he would have devoured them. In like manner as He stilled the king of Assyria, when he roared and raged against Jerusalem." Barnes: "This is perhaps a more striking and wonderful exhibition of the power of God than that of calming down the waves of the ocean. In the one case, it is the exertion of mere power on nature, acting through its established laws, and where there is no resistance of will; in the other, it is power exerted over the will; power over agents, conscious that they are free, and where the worst passions meet and mingle and rage."

The Psalmist indicates the *continuousness* of these manifestations of the Divine power. "Who setteth, . . . Who

stilleth." God is ever present and active both in nature and in human society. He is the Author and Superintendent of all laws of nature, the Force of all forces, &c.

II. The significance of the manifestations of the Divine power. "Thy tokens." These manifestations of the power of God are regarded as indications of His presence and activity. They are signs and pledges of something more than and beyond themselves; they are indications of the character and ability of the mighty Worker. Thus the doings of God in nature are significant of His existence and presence, His power and unchangeableness. His control of tumultuous peoples witnesses to His might and majesty, His righteous sovereignty, &c. Both nature and history, to the thoughtful and reverent observer, are most fruitful of wise suggestion as to the works and ways of God.

III. The influence of the manifestations of the Divine power.

1. *They inspire awe.* "They are afraid at Thy tokens." The exhibitions of the power and glory of God are fitted to impress the mind and heart of men, to awaken reverence and fear of One who is so great in power, &c.

2. *They inspire confidence.* (Ver. 5.) We have here, (1). Confidence for a great blessing. "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us." The word translated terrible contains the idea of the wonderful and the sublime. Reference is made in it to such events as took place in Egypt previous to the emancipation of Israel from bondage—events fitted to impress men with a deep sense of the power and greatness and majesty of God. The Psalmist is confident that by such events God would answer the prayers of His people. To

be assured of sufficient answers to our prayers is confidence for a great blessing. Such assurance would not be possible except in a being of great power. Thus God's might is a basis of trust for man. (2) Confidence in the highest Being. Trust is here reposed in God as a Being whose power is always exercised righteously, and for the salvation of those who trust in Him. "In righteousness Thou wilt answer us, O God of our salvation." Mere power, however great, is inadequate to inspire confidence. It may excite alarm. But the power of God is ever righteous in aim, and beneficent in operation. (3) Confidence in the widest extent. "The confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the sea afar off," denotes the dwellers on the most distant coasts and islands, and the navigators of the most distant seas. The blessings of God are coextensive with the wants of man. There is no other being in the whole universe in whom man may safely confide. The true and only ground of trust for man is the great and gracious God.

3. *They inspire joy.* "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." Moll: "The outgoings of the morning and evening mean the east and west as practical parallels of the ends of the earth." The manifestations of the righteous and beneficent power of God are calculated to inspire joy amongst all peoples everywhere.

CONCLUSION.—We are living amid the manifestations of the Divine power. Do we heed their significance? Do we hear and ponder their message? Are the phenomena of the material world revealing to us the realities of the spiritual universe? Are they aiding us to know God? to reverence, trust, and rejoice in Him?

THE BENEFICENT ACTIVITY OF GOD IN NATURE.

(Verses 9-13.)

The Psalmist's view of nature is not that of the *Atheist*. He regards nature as having been created, and as being constantly sustained by God. Nor that of the *Positivist*. He discovered in na-

ture not only law, and order, and force, but the presence and activity of a Divine Person—God. Nor that of the *Pantheist*. He offers praise to God as a Person having an existence distinct from

and independent of nature. He saw in the world around him the personal presence and the beneficent activity of the Supreme. And the beneficent activity of God in nature he represents as being—

I. Incessant. (Vers. 9-11.) The activity of God in His works is ceaseless. This is manifest—

1. *From the operations which are ascribed to Him.* He is said to prepare the earth for the corn, and the corn for man; to bless the springing of the corn, and to carry it onward in its progress to maturity, until, in the abundance and ripeness of autumn, the year is crowned with His goodness.

2. *From the forms of the verbs which are used to describe those operations.* "Thou visitest, . . . waterest, . . . enrichest, . . . preparest, . . . blestest, . . . crownest," &c. "The present tenses are employed here to express that this God does not in one year only, but every year." His operations in nature are characterised by continuity. In all ages and in all seasons He is at work amidst His creations. He is ever active. This is well expressed by Thomson in his Hymn on the Seasons—

"These, as they change, Almighty Father, these

Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy beauty walks, Thy tenderness and love.
Wide flush the fields; the softening air is
balm;

Echo the mountains round; the forest
smiles,

And every sense and every heart is joy.

Then comes Thy glory in the Summer
months,

With light and heat refulgent. Then Thy
sun

Shoots full perfection through the swelling
year:

And oft Thy voice in dreadful thunder
speaks;

And oft at dawn, deep noon, or falling eve,
By brooks and groves, in hollow-whispering
gales.

Thy bounty shines in Autumn unconfin'd,
And spreads a common feast for all that
lives.

In Winter awful Thou! with clouds and
storms

Around Thee thrown, tempest o'er tempest
rolled,

Majestic darkness! On the whirlwind's wing
Riding sublime, Thou bid'st the world adore,
And humblest nature with Thy northern
blast."

II. Omnipresent. The "furrows" and the "ridges" of the earth He waters abundantly. He gives fertility and beauty to "the pastures of the wilderness;" He girds "the little hills" with joy, and He enrobes the fruitful valleys with corn or covers them with flocks. There is no part of His universe in which He is not present in His beneficent activities. On mountain summits, which are accessible to the gaze only of the strong-winged eagles and the sublime stars, He causes beauty to spring forth. And in dense forests, into which even the most adventurous of men have not penetrated, He is at work producing luxuriant and beautiful forms of vegetation and life. The omnipresence of His beneficent activities may be used—

1. *As a restraint from sin.*

2. *As an encouragement to constant trust in Him.*

3. *As an incentive to reverence Him at all times and in all places.*

III. Abundant. "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it; Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; Thy paths drop fatness." Thus with fulness of expression the Psalmist represents the abundance of the Divine beneficence in nature. The psalm was probably written upon the occasion of a bounteous harvest, or after a copious and much-needed rain. But it is true at all times that the beneficent activities of God are on the largest and most generous scale. We may see this in the great fertility of the earth when wisely and diligently cultivated. How rich is the reward of such cultivation! Scenes of fertility, plenty, and beauty, like that sketched by the Poet, are to be found in vast numbers in our own land to-day. Both in nature and in grace God bestows His gifts with infinite munificence.

IV. Joy-inspiring. "The little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Nature is here represented as singing for joy in its prosperity. The idea is both natural and poetical. And to man the benefi-

cent activities of God in the material creation should ever be a source of grateful and reverent joy. The abundant provision which He thus makes for our needs should awaken our gratitude. The wide-spread diffusion of beauty should enkindle our admiration. And in all we should see and praise Him.

CONCLUSION.—Let us learn—1. *To recognise the presence and power of God in nature.* 2. *To praise the goodness of God in nature.* 3. *To worship God as*

seen in nature. Let us tread the earth as a temple alive with the presence and radiant with the glory of God. 4. *To trust God as the God of nature.* We have His promise—"While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." He will not fail to fulfil His promise. 5. *To regard His beneficence in nature as an illustration of the more precious blessings of salvation.*

A MAY HOMILY.

(Verse 10. "Thou blessest the springing thereof.")

Nature in all her moods and phases is always ministerial, if we will have it. One may speak, for instance, of the opening of the spring, as a kind of annual Divine Sacrament, by attending upon which with wise and meek surrender, the better man in us may be awakened and stimulated. . . . As Christ instituted the bread and wine, to be a means of aiding His followers in their remembrance of Him and their communion with Him; so does the holy Father give us every year the marvels and minstrelies of spring, to aid us in growing fine and rising higher. He *blesse*s the general flushing and budding. It is consecrated for us, to be an advantage to us spiritually, if we will allow it. We speak of our Sundays, our religious services, our daily tasks and difficulties as means of grace; and the vernal advent and encompassment is no less really a means of grace, to be utilised to profit, or neglected to loss and condemnation.

I. *Who is there who has not felt and acknowledged the softening, expanding, genialising influence of the spring; its sweetening effect upon the mental mood and temper? . . . Only look at the people's faces, as they meet one another by the way, some fine morning in the first burst of spring! How full of good-humour they are, how warmly they salute, how disposed they seem to be more generous and charitable than usual! . . . You may explain it physiologically, I am quite aware; but then,*

it is not less God coming to you, in and through physiological laws and processes, with an opportunity of improvement, with a tide to bear and lift you, if taken at the flood, toward a permanently better, a permanently sweeter and more gracious spirit. It is a Divine means of grace. What you have to do is, just to seize the vernal feeling that has risen in you, and cherish and go forth with it: namely, by starting from the height of it, under the impulse of it, with new resolves and endeavours to *cultivate* the genial and generous temper; and by seeking to put it at once, before it fades, into some corresponding deed. Now, while it is upon you, go and *give* something to somebody's need; go and *do* something for somebody's good.

II. *Does not the present season tend to excite in us, at times, strange, vague, mysterious yearnings—yearnings amounting often to pain? . . . I recall vividly a sketch I once saw—a slight but very striking sketch—a lone evening shore, with the sun slowly sinking into the sea, and a woman sitting gazing at it from the beach, her hands clasped round her knees, a far-off, weary, wistful look in her eyes, her face as the face of one who listens for something that is unheard, and longs for more than is seen. It was as though the dying sun were drawing her to himself; as though presently she must arise and seek him through the waves, aching to find with him—she knew not what—but the larger, the brighter, the happier that seemed to be*

calling her. Now that is an illustration of what I mean; when nature lays her hand upon us, and sets us dreamily yearning, as she is especially apt to do in her annual springing. . . . You feel pensive. There are strange stirrings and pinings in your breast that you hardly understand. The life in which hitherto you have been content and happy, seems poor and insipid and unsatisfying. The money you have made, the secular successes you have won, seem less worth than they were; and you reach home rather low-spirited, oppressed with a vague sense of want, a vague longing. What does it mean? The grace of the season has somehow swept the diviner depths in you, and caused a sudden blind motion and flutter there. . . . Turn the feeling before it dies into a prayer—a prayer to be filled and satisfied from the Lord; a prayer to be made willing to seek and do in harmony with His will. . . . It is an accepted time, a day of salvation; do not lose it.

III. *Has not the loveliness of spring, and the beautiful order which it expresses and reveals, brought home to us now and*

again, by the force of contrast, the uglinesses and disorders that abound in man's world, and constrained us to ponder and bewail them afresh? . . . Whenever the spring leads you to lament thus, what is it but a fresh Divine call to you to philanthropic labour and effort; a fresh Divine impression upon you of humanity's sore needs and woes; that you may be awakened to increased sympathy with them, and urged to attempt more towards their relief? Seek, then, to waken and urge yourselves with it. Do not allow the feeling to evaporate in mere melancholy musings or pensive poetry; but let it bear you forth to heartier and more earnest ministry; make it a means of stimulating your benevolent activity. Go, with the tears for the miseries and evils of man's world which the musical groves and the fine order of nature may have started in your eyes, to weep helpfully with them that weep, and to stream with renewed endeavour against the works of the devil. So shall the springing which the Lord blesses be blessed indeed.—*S. A. Tipple.* Abridged from *The Day of Rest.*

THE FIRST SABBATH IN THE NEW-YEAR.

(Verse 11. "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness.")

Let us, though it be generally and rapidly, mark that goodness which has crowned the year—

I. **As to our country.** I love the pious patriotism of the ancient Jews, whose hearts hovered over Zion even in her desolations and pronounced their blessing upon all the lovers of Jerusalem. Nor does justice, less than piety, demand this recognition of our national mercies, since there is not one of them which is not, in some of its results, a blessing to ourselves. . . . Ours is a country to which God has given one of the mightiest empires ever swayed by man;—a country where, amidst much of darkness, a brighter light of evangelical truth is shining; where, in the midst of awful vice, there is a higher degree of public and private virtue than in any other; a country whose civil and

religious institutions are, at once, the light and admiration of a great part of the world, &c.

That such a state of things has been continued, by the good providence of God, through another year, is matter of devout thanksgiving, &c.

II. **As to our families.** I love to mark the blessed effects of Christianity upon families connected by blood, and, as it were, identified in the same joys, and sorrows, and interests of life. . . . Such was the family at Bethany which Jesus loved; and many such are found, I trust, among you. Remember your family mercies. As to most of you, how exempt have you been from any but those ordinary cares and transient visitations to which all are subject! The circle of your family hearth is unbroken, &c.

III. As to our personal experience.

I lose sight of your preservations from bodily danger and death, &c. Subjects these not to be forgotten by you, and never to be remembered without grateful devotion. But I merge them now in the higher considerations suggested by the spiritual blessings which have been granted to you. . . . When considering spiritual blessings as the portion of any man, we cannot but mount up to that boundless, that mysterious goodness which humbled the eternal Word to humanity, and spared Him not from the sorrows of the cross, in order, so to speak, to free itself from the restraints of Divine justice, that it might recover and bless mankind. . . . What affecting instances of goodness spring from this! &c.

Some during the past year have been, for the first time, made the subjects of the renewing grace of God; on you I call this day for special acknowledgment. From what a depth of misery and danger have you been plucked! &c.

I address others of you who have longer known this grace in truth, and to whom the experience of the past year has been comforting and advancing. And this you owe to the special goodness of God. . . . Your light is light from Him; your strength, strength from Him. "By the grace of God I am what I am." "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness."

But do I awaken in any heart the painful remembrance of religious barrenness and declension? God has not dealt with you according to your un-

faithful dealings with Him, &c. Let this recollection of the goodness of God come to you, giving greater tenderness to your sorrows, strength to your desires, and new life to your hopes. "Return, ye backsliding children," &c.

IV. As to the universal Church. True piety identifies us with the universal Church. How gladdened should be our hearts if she has been, through the grace of God, faithful to her high calling, and has prospered in her work!

CONCLUDE—1. *By addressing those to whom it has been a year of special affliction.* You have had afflictions, but you have likewise had mercies. Nor has God visited you with all the suffering that you have deserved, and which, therefore, He might have inflicted. And what have been many of your troubles but blessings in disguise? . . . The chastening was not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, it has yielded to you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Can you number no mercies among the wants of the past year? Thank God, then, and take courage.

2. *I beseech you, brethren, by all these mercies, that you present yourselves a living sacrifice unto God.* Renounce every other authority, and submit to Him (Ps. cxviii. 27; cxvi. 8, 9). Every renewed mercy increases our obligations to love and serve Him; and happy is that man, who, under the full power of joyous and grateful feeling, so surrenders himself to God, as to live for no other purpose than that of glorifying Him.—*Richard Watson.* Abridged.

PSALM LXVI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "A Psalm or Song." See Introduction to Ps. xlviii.

Both the author and the occasion of the psalm are unknown.

Hengstenberg: "The psalm is a song of thanksgiving of the Church of God, after a protracted and severe trial. It is divided into three great parts. In the first, God is praised (1-7), on account of what He does to Israel at all times, in the second (8-12), on account of what He had just now done, and in the third (13-20), the Church vows her gratitude."

Homiletically we have in the psalm the following themes for meditation, *Praise to God for His mighty works* (vers. 1-7); *Praise for His great kindness in affliction* (vers. 8-12); and *The declaration of a grateful soul* (vers. 13-20).

PRAISING GOD FOR HIS MIGHTY WORKS.

(Verses 1-7.)

Consider—

I. The reason of this praise. The Psalmist calls upon all lands to praise God because of His mighty and majestic doings. And in so doing he sets forth—

1. *The nature of His works.* With mighty power God is ever engaged in governing the nations of the world. "He ruleth by His power for ever," &c. Three features of His government are here indicated by the poet. (1.) *Its perfect knowledge.* "His eyes behold the nations." Moll: "His eyes keep watch upon the nations." The plans of the enemies of Himself and of His people are all known unto Him. They can conceal nothing from Him; and His people in all their circumstances and all their needs are ever before Him. He has a clear and full view of all things. (2.) *Its subjugation of enemies.* In the second verse it is said, "How terrible art Thou in Thy works! through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee;" i.e., yield a feigned submission unto Him. By His great power they would be compelled to make a hollow and unwilling profession of loyalty to Him. And in the sixth verse there is a reference to the overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea. There are to-day those who submit to God in loving loyalty, and those who submit only outwardly and from slavish fear. And if men will resist Him to the utmost, then, like the tyrannical monarch of Egypt, they will be crushed by His power. (3.) *Its salvation of His people.* "He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in Him." His power is exerted for the defence and deliverance of those who put their trust in Him; as was seen in the crossing of the Red Sea, and the passage of the Jordan. In His government the interests of His loyal subjects are specially cared for. He is "mighty to save" all who confide in Him, and to crush

incorrigible rebels, however numerous or powerful they may be.

2. *The constancy of His works.* "He ruleth by His power for ever." Hengstenberg: "The Psalmist refers to the passage through the Red Sea and the Jordan, but not as to transactions which took place and were concluded at a given period of time, but as happening really in every age. God's guidance of His people is a constant drying up of the sea and of the Jordan, and the joy over His mighty deeds is always receiving new materials." The exhortation, "Come and see the works of God," implies that these works are actually present. His rule is continuous and everlasting. Though He no longer manifests His power in miraculous deeds, that power is ever working for the overthrow of evil, the salvation of His people, and the extension of His kingdom.

3. *The influence of His works.* The mighty deeds of the Most High are calculated, (1.) *To excite awe.* "How terrible art Thou in Thy works! . . . He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men!" His deeds reveal His tremendous majesty, and are fitted to inspire the mind with reverent fear. (2.) *To check rebellion against Him.* "Let not the rebellious exalt themselves." What is the strength of the mightiest when measured against His? The sinner is battling against Omnipotence. "Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him?" "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish," &c. (3.) *To inspire confidence in Him.* The Psalmist represents the mighty deeds of God as a reason for praise, an incitement to universal worship, and a cause for rejoicing in Him. These things imply trust in Him. His majestic works quickened the souls of His people into the exercise of a lively confidence in Him. When we mark how righteously and beneficently His almightiness is exercised, we see that it is well fitted

to quicken and strengthen our faith in Him.

4. *The necessity of observing His works.* "Come and see the works of God." It is only as the glorious deeds of God are thoughtfully and reverently regarded by us, that they will beneficially affect our mind and heart. But when they are attentively and devoutly considered, they will inspire trust and gratitude, admiration and praise in us, even as they did in the poet. Do we thus consider the doings of God in His government of the world to-day? Do these doings enkindle our hearts into resolute trust and holy song? Surely they are well fitted to do so, unless we are in arms against Him.

II. *The enthusiasm of this praise.* "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands. Sing forth the honour of His name; make His praise glorious." The praise for which the poet calls is to be offered—

1. *Heartily.* "Make a joyful noise unto God." "Shout for joy to God." The mere "shout" is worthless in the sight of God. But when the shout is the natural expression of the heart's zeal and fervour, it is acceptable to Him. Languid praises are utterly inadequate to celebrate His doings, and are repugnant to Him.

2. *Joyfully.* "Make a joyful noise unto God." "Shout for joy." To be acceptable to God praise must be offered not as a duty, but as a privilege. To the devout heart praise is pleasure, worship is delight.

3. *Openly.* "Shout for joy unto God; . . . sing forth the honour of His name," &c. We must celebrate the praise of God openly, that men may see that we are not ashamed of doing so, and that they may be encouraged to unite with us in the holy and joyous exercise. When we think of what God

is ever doing for us, how enthusiastic should our praise to Him be! When we think of Jesus Christ and the blessings of redemption, how fervent and rapturous and ceaseless should be our songs!

III. *The universality of this praise.* "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands, . . . All the earth shall worship Thee, and shall sing unto Thee; they shall sing to Thy name." The poet was confident that the heathen world would be won from their idolatries and atheism to the worship of the living and true God. His prophetic announcement is not yet fully accomplished. But we are confident that it will be—

1. *Because of the character and perfections of God.* He is good to all men, and His goodness is calculated to awaken the gratitude of all. His character is fitted to inspire the admiration and adoration of all men. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

2. *Because of the history of His worship amongst men.* The worship of many heathen deities has passed away. Men are casting their "idols which they made to worship to the moles and to the bats." But the number of His worshippers is ever increasing. His empire over human souls grows constantly and rapidly. Its past history is prophetic of its full and final triumph.

3. *Because of the predictions of His Word.* The Holy Book is clear and triumphant in its declarations on this point. (See Ps. xxii. 27, lxxii. 8-19; Isa. xlv. 23; Mal. i. 11; Luke xiii. 29; Rom. xiv. 11; *et al.*)

CONCLUSION.—*Let this glorious prospect—1. Incite us to toil for its realisation. 2. Encourage us to pray for its realisation. 3. Stimulate us to praise Him who has promised its realisation.*

PRaising GOD FOR HIS GREAT KINDNESS IN AFFLICTION.

(Verses 8-12.)

The Psalmist in these verses sets before us—

I. *A great affliction.* This affliction is—

1. *Variously represented.* The poet uses a number of expressive figures to set forth the distress through which the people had passed. These figures re-

present it as, (1.) *Imprisoning*. "Thou broughtest us into the net." Moll: "Thou hast brought us into the enclosure." The idea is that of straitness, confinement. The soul sometimes seems surrounded with trouble, from which there is no escape. (2.) *Oppressing*. "Thou laidst affliction upon our loins." Moll: "Hast laid an oppressive burden on our loins." Barnes: "The loins are mentioned as the seat of strength (comp. Deut. xxxiii. 11; 1 Kings xii. 10; Job xl. 16); and the idea here is, that He had put their strength to the test: He had tried them to see how much they could bear; He had made the test effectual by applying it to the part which was able to bear most. He had tried them to the utmost." (3.) *Degrading*. "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads." Hengstenberg: "Thou didst let men ride upon our head." The head is mentioned as the noblest part. And the idea is that the sufferers had been not only vanquished, but treated by their conquerors with the utmost indignity and tyranny. Their enemies had insulted them, scorned them, degraded them. (4.) *Consuming*. "We went through fire." The passing through fire indicates trial which involves extreme danger. The severest trials we speak of as "fiery trials." (5.) *Overwhelming*. "We went through water." Barnes: "It was as if they had been made to pass through burning flames and raging floods (comp. Isa. xliii. 2). Instead of passing through the seas and rivers when the waters had been turned back, and when a dry and safe path was made for them, as was the case with their fathers (ver. 6), they had been compelled to breast the flood itself." This representation of the affliction of the people shows that their distresses were numerous, various, and severe. From trials of one kind they passed, and then had to encounter trials of another kind. And some of these trials threatened to destroy their very existence. Their experience in this respect is an illustration of the experience of some of the people of God in all ages.

This severe affliction was—

2. *Permitted by God*. "Thou broughtest us into the net; Thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused," &c. They recognised the hand of God in their distresses. The strongest and most daring enemy of the people of God has no power but what is given him from above. These afflictions could not have befallen them without the Divine permission. All sufferings are either sent by God, or permitted by Him. *The realisation of this by the unbeliever is an aggravation of suffering; by the believer, a blessing in suffering.* "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." (See on Ps. xxxix. 9.)

II. *Great kindness in great affliction*. The kindness of God as celebrated by the Psalmist was manifest—

1. *In preserving the afflicted*. "Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." He had protected them amid the dangers which threatened their life; and He had not left their feet to totter or stumble so as to cause them to fall. Their enemies failed to crush them, and the fire to consume them, and the flood to overwhelm them; because God defended them.

2. *In the design of the affliction*. "Thou, O God, hast proved us; Thou hast tried us as silver is tried." The design of their affliction was, (1.) *The testing of character*. "As silver is tried" in the fire, so God had tested the reality of their faith, and hope, and patience. "When God doth afflict you," says Caryl, "then He doth bring you to the touchstone to see whether you are good metal or no; He doth bring you then to the furnace, to try whether you be dross or gold, or what you are. Affliction is the great discoverer that unmasks us. . . . Some will hold on with God as long as the sun shineth, as long as it is fair weather; but if the storm arise, if troubles come, whether personal or public, then they pull in their heads, then they deny and forsake God, then they draw back from Him, and betray His truth; what they, such and such men! Trouble makes the greatest trial; bring professors to

the fire, and then they show their metal." So He tried Abraham and Job, *et al.* (2.) *The improving of character.* Silver is put into the smelting furnace in order to remove its dross. Afflictions are designed to purify and perfect the character. (Comp. Isa. i. 25 ; xlviii. 10 ; Zech. xiii. 19 ; Mal. iii. 3 ; Jas. i. 2, 3, 12 ; 1 Pet. i. 7.)

3. *In the issue of the affliction.* "Thou broughtest me out into a wealthy place." Margin : "Moist." Hengstenberg : "Thou didst lead us out to affluence." Conant : "Thou hast brought us out to overflowing plenty." Moll : "Thou hast brought us out into abundance." Calvin : "The sum is, although God at times may chastise severely His own people, yet He always gives them a happy and joyful issue." M. Henry : "God brings His people into trouble that their comforts afterwards may be the sweeter, and that their affliction may thus yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, which will make the poorest place in the world a wealthy place." The troubles of the people of God will be brought by Him to the most blessed and glorious issue.

III. Praise for great kindness in great affliction. "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His

praise to be heard." Three points are here suggested—

1. *Praise for general mercies does not supersede the obligation of special praise for special mercies.* The poet in the former strophe had called for enthusiastic praise to God for His regular and constant activity for the benefit of His people ; now he calls again for praise for the special deliverance and blessing which he commemorates.

2. *Praise for the great kindness of God is all the more fervent and delightful when we are assured of our personal interest in Him.* "O bless our God!" Blessed indeed are they who can thus regard Him. His mercies to them will be doubly precious. And their praise of Him will be specially hearty and confiding and pleasurable.

3. *The heart that is fervent in His praises will seek to engage others therein.* "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise to be heard." The grateful and fervent heart would enlist multitudes in this service, and sound His praise abroad on all sides.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the afflicted wait upon God in patience and hope.* 2. *Let those delivered from affliction praise Him with gratitude and gladness.*

THE DECLARATION OF A GRATEFUL SOUL.

(Verses 13–20.)

"We have now," says Perowne, "the *personal* acknowledgment of God's mercy, first, in the announcement on the part of the Psalmist of the offerings which he is about to bring, and which he had vowed in his trouble ; and then, in the record of God's dealings with his soul, which had called forth his thankfulness." We have here—

I. Help in trouble implored by man. The poet is speaking of the time "when he was in trouble," and he says, "I cried unto Him with my mouth," &c. From his statements we learn that—

1. *His prayer was presented in uprightness of heart.* "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not

hear me." The Psalmist was sincere in his approaches to God. He did not cherish sin in his heart while seeking the help of God. The man who loves sin will not obtain favourable answers to his prayers. On this point the Sacred Scriptures are most explicit. (Job xxvii. 8, 9 ; Prov. xv. 29 ; xxviii. 9 ; Isa. i. 15 ; lix. 1, 2 ; John ix. 31 ; 1 John iii. 21, 22.)

2. *His prayer was offered with solemn promises.* The Psalmist says, "I will pay Thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken when I was in trouble." Under the pressure of great suffering he had uttered solemn promises to God. It is a very common occurrence when men

are suffering some great affliction to make vows of reformation of life, or, in the case of the godly, of more thorough consecration to God, if He will remove the affliction.

3. *His prayer was offered in confident anticipation of a gracious answer.* "I cried unto Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue." Hengstenberg: "A song of praise was under my tongue." The meaning seems to be that the poet was so confident of a favourable response to his prayer that he had in readiness a hymn of praise, which he would sing as soon as the help sought was obtained. He was "enabled by faith and hope to give glory to Him when he was seeking for mercy and grace from Him, and to praise Him for mercy in prospect though not yet in possession."

II. Help in trouble granted by God. "Verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer." The Psalmist had received from God a favourable answer to his prayer. The help which he had sought God granted unto him. The answer to his prayer may be regarded—

1. *As a proof of the uprightness of his heart.* A fundamental condition of acceptable prayer is that the soul shall be sincere and free from secretly-cherished sin. "As it is a settled and universal principle that God does not hear prayer when there is in the heart a cherished love and purpose of iniquity, so it follows that, if there is evidence that He *has* heard our prayers, it is proof that He has seen that our hearts are sincere, and that we truly desire to forsake all forms of sin."

2. *As a result of his confidence in God.* God always graciously hears and answers the prayer of faith. If we honour God by confidently anticipating His blessing, He will reward us by abundantly bestowing that blessing. In our dealings with Him trustful anticipation of His grace will ever lead to joyous celebration of His praise.

III. Help in trouble recounted to men. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." Notice—

1. *The invitation.* "Come and hear; and I will declare." It is natural for the heart rejoicing in some great deliverance granted, or some great blessing bestowed, to tell to others its glad experience. Because (1) All great emotions seek expression. Thus the forgiven sinner longs to declare his gratitude and gladness, and thus to honour God. (2) All godly souls seek to lead others into the possession of the privileges and joys which they have received. The genius of true religion is broad, liberal, generous.

2. *The audience.* "All ye that fear God." Barnes: "All who are true worshippers of God—the idea of fear or reverence being put for worship in general. The call is on all who truly loved God to hear what He had done, in order that He might be suitably honoured, and that due praise might be given Him." The godly man's experience of the Divine mercy should be recounted to a fitting audience. Many of the experiences of the spiritual life are too tender and sacred to be communicated to any save sympathetic hearers.

3. *The testimony.* "What He hath done for my soul." Much that is called "religious experience" and "personal testimony" is repulsively egotistic and conceited—the narrative of the feelings and doings of small and selfish souls, too much given to morbid self-introspection. The world would be much the better if it were rid of such stuff completely and for ever. The Psalmist wishes to recount not what he has done, but what God has done for him. Here is a kind of testimony worth listening to. "When you tell others of the guidances of God respecting your soul, take care lest some hypocrisy or self-love creep in, and that the glory of God be your only aim."

IV. Help in trouble acknowledged to God. "I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings," &c. (vers. 13–15, 20). This acknowledgment was characterised by—

1. *Faithfulness.* "I will pay Thee my vows, which my lips have uttered," &c. Note: (1) The frequency with which vows are made in time of trouble.

(2) The frequency with which they are forgotten when the trouble is removed. (3) The solemn obligation to fulfil them. God does not forget them, but waits their fulfilment. Both gratitude for the removal of the affliction, and faithfulness to the promise made, bind us to their fulfilment. The vows which he made in the night of adversity the Psalmist fulfils in the day of prosperity.

2. *Comprehensiveness.* "I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings; I will offer unto Thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks, with goats. Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me." He resolves to offer fat lambs and bullocks with rams and goats, and to offer them as burnt sacrifices to be wholly consumed to the honour of God. He will "present sacrifices in *all* the forms required in worship; in all the forms that will express gratitude to God, or that will be an acknowledgment of dependence and guilt; in all that would properly express homage to the Deity." And He presents the offering of praise as well as of gifts. Both material and spiritual sacrifices he presented unto God.

3. *Heartiness.* Hengstenberg: "The full enumeration of the animals to be offered in sacrifice, shows the zeal with which the thanks and the offerings are given." Renschel: "A noble thanksgiving is due to a great benefit." Great mercies should be acknowledged in fervent and hearty praise.

"King of glory, King of peace,
I will love Thee:
And that love may never cease,
I will move Thee.

Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me:
Thou didst note my working breast,
Thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing Thee,
And the cream of all my heart
I will bring Thee.

Though my sins against me cried,
Thou didst clear me;
And alone, when they replied,
Thou didst hear me.

Sev'n whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise Thee.
In my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise Thee.

Small it is, in this poor sort
To enroll Thee:
Ev'n eternity is too short
To extol Thee."—*Geo. Herbert.*

THE EXPERIENCE OF A GODLY MAN.

(Verses 16–20.)

I. The godly man is anxious to impart his experience to others. "Come and hear."

1. *His confession is volunteered, not enforced.* There is nothing here to justify that spiritual inquisition which some have sought to establish in the Romish confessional, or its Anglican imitations.

2. *Spiritual experiences should be told at suitable times.* "Come and hear." It is wrong to parade soul matters at unseasonable times. Many have brought religion into disrepute by preaching when they ought to have simply and unostentatiously practised its precepts.

3. *Spiritual experience should be addressed to congenial hearers.* "All ye that fear God." We should remember that spiritual things can be comprehended only by the spiritually-minded.

4. *Spiritual experiences should be strictly personal.* "What He hath done for my soul." In this matter we may properly talk about ourselves without egotism. Much that has obtained currency for "experience," has been either fiction, or religious scandal.

II. The godly man's experience includes both penitence and praise.

1. *He has to tell of sin mourned over.* "I cried unto Him." This is just the language that would describe the outburst of a penitent soul.

2. *He has to tell of trouble endured.* The trouble has been greater than he could bear; it has been more than he could fight against; hence he has cried to One higher than he.

3. *He has to tell of mercies received.* "He was extolled with my tongue."

This He has done for my soul: I sinned, and He forgave me; I was in trouble, and He helped me. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard," &c.

III. **The godly man's logic.** "If I regard iniquity," &c. The purport of the Christian's story is—not that he has not sinned; but that God has forgiven the iniquity of his sin, and has given him grace to overcome sin. "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." The Christian's argument is this: If I cherish sin in my heart, God will not hear my prayer. But God has heard me. Therefore it is clear that His grace has been effective in my heart in subduing the power of sin. The answered prayer is

the proof that I have been enabled by grace to overcome sin.

IV. **The godly man's experience** always culminates in a song of praise. Even when he has most plainly established his innocence, he ascribes the glory to God, whose mercy has not been withdrawn, and who still hears and answers prayer. This closing song implies three things—

1. *That God's mercy is continuous;* else iniquity would prevail, and be cherished in the heart.

2. *That God hears prayer unweariedly.*

3. *That the disposition to pray is also God's gift.*—"The Homiletic Quarterly."

PSALM LXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription. "To the chief Musician:" see Introduction to Ps. Ivii. "On Neginoth:" see Introduction to Ps. liv. "A Song or Psalm:" see Introduction to Ps. xlviii.

Neither the author of the psalm nor the occasion of its composition are known unto us.

The chief feature of the psalm is the intense desire of the Psalmist (who wrote the psalm for the Temple service) for the universal worship of God. This is quite clear from the repetition of ver. 3. Twice in this brief poem he exclaims, "Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee."

Homiletically, we regard the psalm as setting forth—

THE MISSIONARY PRAYER OF THE CHURCH.

Consider—

I. **The great object of the missionary prayer of the Church.** In this psalm, the Church seeks,

1. *That God may be known by all men.* (1.) *As to His way.* "That Thy way may be known upon earth." The way of God is His procedure towards mankind; "the principles and methods of the Divine administration; the way in which God rules mankind, and in which He bestows His blessings on men." It seems to us that to understand this way aright we must view it as comprising two aspects: the way of the Divine requirement, or what He demands from men; and the way of the Divine treatment, or what He does for men. (2.) *As to His salvation.* "Thy saving health among all nations." Instead of "saving health," we should

read, *salvation.* The Church prays that the Divine salvation may be known by all peoples—that all peoples may experience it. The heart that knows the blessedness of personal religion will seek to extend that experience to others. There is a vital connection between these two branches of knowledge. "If God make known His way to us, and we walk in it, He will show us His saving health." In the way of Divine requirement and the way of Divine treatment, in God's grace and his own obedience to God, man finds salvation.

2. *That God may be worshipped by all men.* "Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy." We have here (1.) *Worship in its object.* "Let the people praise Thee, O God." It is natural and right that the

kindest Being should be regarded with gratitude, the best Being with reverence. Both on account of what He *is* and of what He *does*, God should be praised. He is the *only true* object of worship. (2.) Worship in its *character*. "O let the nations be glad and sing for joy." The worship of God should be joyous. Its fitting expressions are songs, not groans; declarations of confidence, not the murmurs of discontent. (3.) Worship in its *extent*. "Let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations," &c. It is a prayer that all the Gentiles may be brought to know and worship the Lord God. (See on Ps. lxvi. 4.) Let us clearly and firmly apprehend the *universality of the aim of this prayer*. How grand this aim! A saved world joyously worshipping the one living and true God!

II. The means by which the attainment of this object is sought. These means are various; but that which is brought into prominence here is *Prayer for the gracious presence of God with His Church*. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us." Margin: "With us." Moll: "'Among us.' The expression among or with us does not indicate the nearness of the help but the accompanying, or better, the guiding presence of God." There is a manifest reference to the benediction of the High Priest (Numb. vi. 24-26). To cause the face to shine upon any one is to look upon him with favour. It is a beautiful representation of the Divine approval and blessing. This blessing is sought *as a favour*, not demanded as a right. The Divine mercy, and not their own merit, is the ground on which their petition is urged. "God be merciful unto us." How profound is the philosophy of this prayer! Superficially the idea is: Bless us with guidance, with prosperity, with outward and visible tokens of Thy blessing, so that the heathen, in the hope of sharing in these favours, may be led to acknowledge Thee. But there is a deeper and more spiritual idea here: when the Church is richly filled with the presence and blessing of her Divine Lord, men will numerous and eagerly seek

to know the way and salvation of God. A living, active, holy Church would speedily result in the conversion of the world to God. What the Church most pressingly needs for the accomplishment of her great work is not more numerous agencies, not new methods of evangelisation, not increase of material wealth, but a deeper and more abiding realisation of the presence and blessing of God in her midst. Our successes in missionary enterprise, both at home and abroad, are comparatively few and small because we are spiritually feeble; we are spiritually feeble because our realisation of the presence of God with us is so fluctuating and faint; and our realisation of the presence of God with us is faint and fluctuating because we have not sought it with earnest purpose and strong faith. "These," says Guenther, "are the true prophets and teachers, upon whose countenance the glance of the Divine light still remains." When that light shines clearly upon the countenances of the members of the Christian Church, the day will not be far distant when "all the people" shall praise God.

III. The confidence in which this prayer is offered. Here are two things—

1. *The confidence expressed.* "God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him." The poet expresses the assurance that the object prayed for would be granted; that God would bless His own people, and that so the world would be won to Him in joyous worship.

2. *The basis of this confidence.* This is twofold. (1) *The relation of God to men, and His work for men.* "Thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth." God appears here as the *righteous Sovereign* of men. The great principles of the Divine government as seen in the history of the world are so righteous and gracious that the heathen will joyously give Him their allegiance. He also appears here as the *gracious Leader* of men. Margin: "And lead the nations." Hengstenberg: "And guidest." Pe-

rowne: "The verb is the same as in Ps. xxiii. 3, God being the great Shepherd of all nations." He guides in paths of safety, prosperity, peace, and life. His government and guidance are powerful incentives to trust and worship Him. (2) *The blessing bestowed upon the Church.* The Hebrew verb in the first clause of ver. 6 is in the past tense. Conant: "The earth hath yielded her increase." Hengstenberg: "The land gave its increase." There is an obvious reference to a recent harvest. Calvin expresses what we hold as the meaning and bearing of the clause: "As often as God adorned that ancient people

with His benefits, He, at the same time, shone upon the whole world with a burning torch, so as to allure the heathen to seek Him." His blessings to His Church encourage and strengthen faith in the progress, and ultimately the complete triumph of His cause and kingdom. (For additional grounds of confidence see on Ps. lxi. 4.)

CONCLUSION.—The subject presents to us a word of—1. *Encouragement.* How glorious is the prospect! 2. *Instruction.* How wise are the means for realising it! 3. *Exhortation.* Let us diligently use these means. "God be merciful unto us," &c.

GOD REALISED BY HIS PEOPLE.

(Verse 6.)

"Our own God shall bless us."

The heathen nations had their numerous gods,—gods for every phase of nature, for all seasons, and for all events. But these gods were senseless idols, puerile, contemptible, and valueless; so also were all those who trusted in them. (See Ps. cxv.) But Jehovah was the God of Israel, and as such the object of their faith and hope. In Him they trusted, to Him gave homage, and in Him exulted, as in the text.

Observe—

I. *The Divine Being, in the text—"God."* This Being was unknown to the heathen, but He revealed Himself to the holy patriarchs, and especially to Abraham and Moses. Our God,

1. *Is a Spirit, not material.* Angels are in a secondary sense spirits; but it is obvious that they have ethereal vestments, and can manifest themselves, and be seen by men; but not so God (John iv. 24; 2 Cor. iii. 17; Col. i. 15; Heb. xi. 27).

2. *Self-existent.* He, the Creator, has no maker; from Himself and in Himself,—absolutely underived; before all things (Deut. iv. 35; Isa. xlv. 6).

3. *Eternal.* From eternity to eternity,—God. No beginning, nor capable of any end of His existence (Isa. lvii. 15; Rom. i. 20).

4. *Unchangeable;* or, He would not

be absolutely perfect. "The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." So in His essence, attributes, and purposes; of one eternal, unalterable mind (Mal. iii. 6; Jas. i. 17).

5. *Omnipotent*,—of unlimited energy. Able to do all things worthy of His effectuating (Gen. xvii. 1; Rev. xix. 6).

6. *Omniscient*,—knowing all things accurately, distinctly, infallibly. And, with these His natural attributes, *possessing every moral perfection*—wisdom, holiness, goodness, truth, mercy, love. Such is the Divine Being exhibited in the text.

II. *His relationship to us.* "Our own God." Not merely the God of the universe, the only God, the God of the seraphim and the holy angels, but "our God." The God—

1. *Of our being.* Our Maker, Father, source of existence (Gen. ii. 7; Job xxxiii. 4; Ps. cxxxix. 14; Isa. lvii. 6).

2. *Our good Benefactor.* Fountain of all goodness, the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Exod. xxxiv. 6; 1 Chron. xvi. 34; Ps. xxxiii. 5).

3. *Our Divine Lord and Ruler.* To whom we are subject, and owe all loyal obedience, and worship, and love (2 Kings xix. 15; 2 Chron. xx. 6; Ps. xcv. 3).

4. *Our covenant God,* who remembered us in our low estate, and in infi-

nite condescension and mercy entered into gracious covenant relationship with His Son for our redemption and restoration to holiness and eternal life (2 Sam. xxiii. 5 ; Jer. xxxi. 31 ; Heb. viii. 8).

5. *Our gracious God*, who has called us and adopted us into His Divine and heavenly family.

6. *The God of our profession and worship*. Ours by obedience to His call, and faith in His name, and avowal of delight in His service.

7. *Our God for ever and ever*,—in close, unbroken fellowship, and eternal oneness and joy. God is ours consciously by the indwelling of His Spirit, and by our union with His only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

III. *The blessed assurance of this relationship*,—"shall bless us."

1. *With all the good we need*.

2. *With the evident tokens of His favour*. His Spirit, His presence, communion, &c.

3. *With the rich treasures of His grace*.

4. *With eternal life and glory*.

A few words in conclusion—

1. These blessings are of His *sovereign bestowment*.

2. Are *laid up* for us in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all fulness dwells.

3. Are *realised* by us as we ask and believe.

4. Are *absolutely certain*, as based on His own immutable word, ratified by His solemn oath and sealed with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus.

5. And are *experienced* by all His saints in the dispensation of His grace and love.

Yes ; "God, our own God will bless us." Grateful acknowledgment and entire consecration are His right and due. To our God be glory evermore.
—*Jabez Burns, D.D.*

PSALM LXVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the Chief Musician." See Introduction to Psalm lvii. "*A Psalm or Song of David*." See Introduction to Psalm xlviii.

The Superscription does not mention the occasion on which the psalm was composed. On this point various opinions have been held and advocated. Most of the older expositors, and Steir and Barnes amongst the moderns, are of opinion that it was composed for the removal of the Ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion (2 Sam. vi.). The view of others is that it was composed to celebrate the victorious termination of some war, when the Ark was brought back to Zion. Throughout the psalm God is praised as the Lord of battle and of victory. Can we ascertain what victory is here celebrated ? For our guidance in this inquiry we have two data. "First, the psalm must have been composed at a time when the sanctuary of the Lord was on Mount Zion (vers. 15, 16, 29, 35). The choice is thus very much narrowed. There remain only two great victories, the Syrian-Edomite, and the Ammonitic-Syrian. Second, in the war referred to in this psalm, the Ark of the Covenant must have been in the field, according to vers. 1 and 24. It is evident from 2 Sam. xi. 11, that this was the case in the Ammonitic war. We may therefore with great probability conclude, that the psalm was composed after the capture of Rabbah (2 Sam. xii. 26-31), which terminated that war, the most dangerous with which David had to do. It was quite in accordance with David's usual manner to celebrate a great religious festival at the close of such a war."—(Hengstenberg). Alexander, Moll, Tholuck, *et al.*, also take this view. The weight of evidence seems to us certainly in favour of it.

"The fundamental thought is clear," says Moll, "namely : The celebration of an entrance of God into His sanctuary on Zion after a victory, and His rule over the world extending itself from thence." The development of this thought we shall endeavour to indicate as we proceed with our homiletical treatment of the psalm.

THE VICTORIOUS MARCH OF THE GOOD.

(Verses 1-10.)

The Psalm opens with a reference to the watchword which was used at the setting forward of the Ark of the Cove-

nant in the journeyings of the Israelites (Num. x. 35). God is entreated to arise for the overthrow of His enemies and

the salvation of His people. The people are exhorted to praise God as the glorious Leader of a victorious march through the desert—One who protects and provides for, who saves and enriches His people. There follows, in vers. 7-10, an illustration of the gracious and glorious guidance of God, as seen in the history of Israel in the wilderness. We regard this section of the psalm as an illustration of *The victorious march of the good*.

I. The march of the good is opposed by enemies. The enemies whom God is invoked to arise against are the enemies of Israel. The people of God in all ages have been a militant people. To day their enemies are numerous and subtle and strong. They have to contend against unbelief and superstition, against carnality and worldliness, against temptations from without, and evil tendencies from within. Conflict is an essential condition of spiritual life and growth in our present state of being. Our advancement in the Christian course is disputed and opposed at every step by our foes. Concerning these enemies the Psalmist makes two things to stand prominently forth—

1. *They are depraved in character.* He speaks of them as “the wicked.” How terrible is the wickedness of any one who would deliberately tempt another to evil, or seek to corrupt a pure mind, or oppose the progress of a godly soul!

2. *They are hostile to the Most High.* They are “His enemies,” they “hate Him.” Think of the appalling iniquity and guilt of hating that Being who is supremely righteous and kind and beautiful! What a terrible perversion of character such hatred indicates! They who oppose the people of God are accounted by Him as His enemies.

II. The march of the good is marked by trials. The character of this journey is indicated in general here as *a march through a desert*. Thus in ver. 4, instead of “Extol Him that rideth upon the heavens,” we should have, “Make a way for Him who rideth forward in the deserts,” or, “Cast up a way for Him that rides through the deserts.”

And in verse 7, “O God, when Thou didst march through the wilderness,” or, “through the desert.” There is much in the circumstances and experiences of the good in this world which is truly illustrated by a pilgrimage in the desert. But this general idea is expanded by the Psalmist in vers. 5 and 6. We have here—

1. *The helpless and sorrowful.* “The fatherless . . . the widows.” These expressions must not be restricted to their literal meaning. They are used to set forth those who have lost their protector and helper, and whose hearts are sorrowful and sore.

2. *The forsaken and lonely.* “The solitary” is intended to represent those who are forsaken, and are destitute of human friendship and help.

3. *The enslaved.* “Those which are bound with chains,” represents not simply those who are literally imprisoned or enslaved, but those who are bound by evil habits or associations, the slaves of superstition and sin, the thralls of fear, who cannot rise to the joy of holy assurance in God.

These classes represent some of the pilgrims in the march of the good in our own day. Even amongst true and godly souls there are weary feet and sad and sorrowful hearts. “Faint, yet pursuing” is a true description of the condition of thousands of travellers on the heavenly road. From our pilgrim state trial is inseparable. We are in the desert with its consuming heat, and sandy wastes, and vast trackless expanses, and prowling enemies.

III. The march of the good is led on victoriously. Mark the glorious Leader. “Let God arise. . . . Him who rideth forward through the deserts. . . . Thou didst march through the wilderness.” There is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant, which victoriously preceded the hosts of Israel. The Ark, with the pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night resting upon it, was the sign of the Divine presence. It was also a type of Christ. He is the great and glorious Leader of His people; and He leads them on from victory to victory. Under His guidance they are—

1. *Victorious over enemies.* "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered," &c. Their victory is (1) *Irresistible.* Their foes are driven before them as smoke before the wind. As wax has no power to resist heat, but melts away under its influence, so the enemies of the hosts of God are unable to stand before Him. When He leads His people to battle their enemies flee powerless and panic-stricken. "Let God arise, as the sun when he goes forth in his strength; and the children of darkness shall be scattered, as the shadows of the evening flee before the rising sun." (2) *Complete.* "As smoke is driven away," &c. Who can recover the smoke-cloud which the wind has scattered far and wide? "Let the wicked perish at the presence of God." The omnipotence of God guarantees the destruction of His enemies, and the triumph of His people. The good have to contend with foes, but "in all things they are more than conquerors through Him that loved" and leads them.

2. *Victorious over difficulties and trials.* Are they marching through a desert? Then God makes the desert as a fruitful field with His own gifts from heaven. "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain." Alexander: "A rain of free gifts." Hengstenberg: "A rain of gifts." There is a reference "to the provision made by God for His people, in temporal matters, during their marchings through the wilderness—the manna, the quails, the water out of the rock," &c. In this we have an illustration of the all-sufficiency and freeness and abundance of the provision which God has made for His people. In things temporal He will withhold no good from them. In things spiritual He has provided for them "a feast of fat things." The provisions of Christianity are abundant, free, rich, satisfying, and pleasant. Are they *helpless and sorrowful*? Then God, their Leader, is their mighty Helper and their gracious Comforter. "A Father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation." God has ever manifested great regard for the widow and fatherless (Exod. xxii. 22-24; Deut. x. 18; Psa.

cxlvi. 7-9; Hos. xiv. 3). He interposes for those who have no helper; He comforts the mourner. It is His greatest glory that He is merciful to the penitent transgressor, and compassionate to the miserable. Are they *faint and weary*? Then God refreshes them. "Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance when it was weary." Hengstenberg: "Thine heritage, the weary one, Thou didst strengthen it." Conant: "When fainting, Thou Thyself hast raised it up." When the Israelites were worn out with fatigue by reason of their journeyings in the wilderness, He refreshed and strengthened them. He sustains and cheers His people in the most exhausting and trying circumstances of their pilgrimage. "He giveth power to the faint," &c. (Isa. xl. 29-31). Are they *enslaved*? He gives to them joyous liberty. "He bringeth out those which are bound with chains." He delivers from the slavery of evil habits, from the tyranny of sin and Satan, from the bondage of fear, &c. Under this glorious Leader difficulties are vanquished and made to contribute to the success of the pilgrim host, trials are bravely borne, and ultimately transformed into blessings, and foes are utterly vanquished. Triumphantly the great Captain of the good leads forward His hosts.

IV. *The march of the good is led on to a glorious termination.* The journey of the Israelites ended at Canaan. There "God made the solitary to dwell at home." In giving them possession of that land; and in protecting them therein against their enemies, He manifested His kindness to them. "Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: Thou, O God, hast prepared of Thy goodness for the poor." "Therein" refers to the land of promise. Though that land has not been expressly mentioned in the preceding verses, yet it was prominently in the mind of the Psalmist. The possession of it was the grand end of the journey through the wilderness. There they found rest, refreshment, provisions in abundance, &c. How glorious is the end of the pilgrimage of the good! Rest from wanderings,

from fears, from conflicts. The possession of purity, peace, joy, &c. Under the guidance of our Lord our march will end at home—our Father's home.

CONCLUSION.—1. *This lead should be earnestly sought.* "Let God arise," &c. Without it we shall "dwell in a dry land." Without it life will be vain, fruitless, and will end in failure. But under His guidance life will grow in purity, power, and usefulness, and will end in triumph and glory.

"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah," &c.

2. *This lead should be heartily rejoiced in.* "Let the righteous be glad," &c. This rejoicing should be *fervent*. "Let them exceedingly rejoice," or, "exult for gladness." Great blessings should enkindle great joys. It should be *religious*. "Let them rejoice before God." Grateful and reverent should be our gladness that we have such a Leader. It should be *uttered*. "Sing unto God," &c. Sing, and so relieve the full heart; sing, and so excite others to do so also.

THE BARREN LOT OF THE WICKED.

(Verse 6.)

"The rebellious dwell in a dry land."

Religion has been misrepresented as a cheerless, gloomy, harsh thing. Our text reverses this. It teaches that irreligion is unsatisfying, that a life of sin is a life of want and disappointment. The children of Israel were being led through the desert unto a land of corn and wine, of milk and honey, &c. But the rebellious are said to dwell in the desert. The former pass through it to a glorious inheritance; the latter dwell in it—their lot is barren, dreary, disappointing, &c. A life of rebellion against God is without satisfaction; it is cheerless, disappointed, wretched. We see this:

I. In relation to the ordinary events of this life. Health and sickness, gain and loss, triumph and defeat, pleasure and sorrow, are found more or less in the life of every man. What is the meaning of these things? What are their uses? &c. The man who trusts in God is in a condition for ascertaining these things, and for making the best use of life's varying experiences. But the opposite is true of "the rebellious." The good man sees in his successes, and in his health, &c., the blessing of a gracious God. He is grateful for that blessing; and is thus twice blessed. He is blessed in his circumstances and in his soul, in his hand and in his heart. But "the rebellious" discover no trace of the goodness of God in the successes

and pleasures of life. To them no spiritual blessing accrues from these things. The highest ministry of these things they entirely lose. The good man derives profit from the dark and trying experiences of life. He believes that trial may be a blessing in disguise, that temporal loss may result in spiritual enrichment, &c. So, by the blessing of God, his greatest losses and crosses lead to his greatest gains and joys. But it is far otherwise with "the rebellious." To them trials and sorrows and losses are unmixed evils. They rebel against trials, and trials become more severe. Temporal losses lead to bitterness of spirit. They kick against the goads, and so injure themselves. So far as their spiritual relation to the circumstances of this life is concerned, "the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

II. In relation to the great needs of the soul. Whether man recognises and acknowledges it or not, it is true that every man has great spiritual needs. We need pardon, help in life's toils and trials, hope as to life's future, &c. Our being craves rest. And to obtain rest we need truth for the intellect, righteousness for the conscience, love for the heart. The godly man finds rest in the truth, righteousness, and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The only way to rest for man is through Christ (Matt. xi. 28-30; John xiv. 6; Rom. v. 1).

But how do "the rebellious" fare in this respect? *Let the Scriptures answer* (Isa. lvii. 20, 21; Jer. ii. 13; Luke xv. 14-17). *Let human experience answer*: When Alexander the Great had subdued all the nations of the earth, so far was he from being satisfied with the conquest of a world, that he wept because he had not another world to conquer. The world did not satisfy his soul's cravings: nor has it satisfied the needs of any soul. All who have chosen the world for their portion, and have had it, have experienced the most bitter disappointment. They have "dwelt in a dry land."

III. In relation to the great future. "If a man die, shall he live again?" "Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" Is he anywhere? The multitudes who once were upon this earth, are they in being now? Whither and to what are we hastening? The be-

liever in Christ has a great and well-grounded hope as to the future. "Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death," &c. "I am the resurrection and the life," &c. To the Christian the future is radiant, beautiful, inviting. But what is it to "the rebellious"? Ah! what? It is shrouded in sable gloom, as of a moonless, starless midnight. The darkness is unbroken, or broken only by dread flashes of lurid light. For "the rebellious" there is "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," &c.

Let "the rebellious" sue for pardon. Let them loyally bow to the authority of God, &c. "Ye worldlings, who wander joylessly through a godless world, with weary feet and withered hearts, seeking rest and finding none, come to Jesus, and He will give you rest."

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.

(Verses 11-14.)

To interpret verses 13 and 14 is confessedly a very difficult task. On ver. 13, Barnes says, "I confess that none of these explanations of the passage seem to me to be satisfactory, and that I cannot understand it." And Moll, at the end of a long note on ver. 14, says, "Since, however, there is no historical statement here, but rather a prophetic declaration, we are rather led to a figurative mode of expression, whose sense, however, is as obscure as its foundation and occasion are unknown." And in Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, art. *Salmon*, we read, "It is usually supposed that this hill is mentioned in a verse of perhaps the most difficult of all the Psalms; and this is probable though the passage is peculiarly difficult, and the precise allusion intended by the poet seems hopelessly lost. . . . Unless the passage is given up as corrupt, it seems more in accordance with reason to admit that there was some allusion present to the poet's mind, the key to which is now lost; and this ought not to surprise any scholar who reflects how many allusions there are in Greek poets—in Pindar, for

example, and in Aristophanes—which would be wholly unintelligible to us now were it not for the notes of Greek scholiasts. To these notes there is nothing exactly analogous in Hebrew literature; and in the absence of some such assistance, it is unavoidable that there should be several passages in the Old Testament respecting the meaning of which we must be content to remain ignorant."

We are quite unable to grapple successfully with this difficulty. For the various renderings and interpretations of verses 13 and 14, let the reader see the Commentaries of Barnes and Moll. We suggest that this strophe may be used to illustrate *the triumph of the Church over her enemies*.

I. In its source. "The Lord gave the word." The word is not simply the announcement of the victory, but the word of authority and power.

1. *He gives the word of command.* The war against evil is Divinely authorised. God Himself bids us do battle with ignorance and vice, with unbelief and superstition, with sin and suffering.

The crusade against evil is a holy one.

2. *He gives the word of promise.* He has granted unto us the assurance of His constant presence and help in the warfare, and of ultimate victory. His word removes all doubt as to the issue of the conflict. (See Ps. ii. 8; lxxii.; Isa. xi. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 25; Heb. viii. 10, 11.) The triumph of the Church is Divinely guaranteed.

3. *He gives the word of power.* "The Almighty scattered kings." He inspires the heart of His soldiers with courage, and nerves their arm with power (Ps. cxliv. 1, 2). The Church will conquer evil through the might of her Saviour and Lord. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

II. *In its completeness.* Graphically the poet represents this. He shows it—

1. *In the utter rout of the foes.* "Kings of armies did flee apace;" or, "The kings of the hosts fled, they fled." There have been times in the history of the Christian Church when the powers of evil have fled in dismay before her faith and effort. These past victories are foreshadowings of grander triumphs yet to come. Darkness and evil are destined to flee before the light and love of God in His Church.

2. *In the greatness of the spoil.* "She that tarried at home divided the spoil." M. Henry: "Not only the men, the soldiers that abode by the stuff, who were, by a statute of distributions, to share the prey (1 Sam. xxx. 24), but even the women that tarried at home had a share, which intimates the abundance of spoil that should be taken." Hengstenberg: "The victory and the spoil, which the Lord imparted to His people, in the season of their childhood, was a type of a far more glorious victory and a more precious spoil. Arnd.: 'Is it not a valuable spoil that so many thousands of men have been converted from heathenism, among whom have been so many glorious teachers and lights of the Church, such as Justin, Augustine, Ambrose, not to speak of

the innumerable martyrs, who were all brought out of heathenism, and were put to death because of their attachment to the Christian faith.'" All the wealth of the world—its silver and gold, its power and beauty, its genius and eloquence—shall one day be laid at the feet of the Lord in joyful homage.

3. *In the subsequent prosperity.* "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet ye shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon." Hengstenberg: "When ye rest between the boundaries, ye are like the wings of doves covered with silver, and their feathers with the gleam of gold. When the Almighty scatters kings in it, it snows on Salmon." He says, "The שָׁכַב implies

peaceful rest, as at Num. xxiv. 9. . . . The שְׂפָתַיִם signifies either sheepfolds or boundaries. . . . At all events the term denotes a state of peaceful rest. In this condition the Israelites, to whom the address is directed, are, taken figuratively, wings of the doves, &c., or they are like doves, whose wings glitter with silver and gold. The allusion is to the play of colours on the wings of the dove in sunshine. The real import is the peaceful and, at the same time, *splendid* condition enjoyed by Israel in the lap of peace. . . . The 'snow' is mentioned here because it has the colour of purest light (comp. Ps. li. 7; Isa. i. 18; Mark ix. 3; Matt. xvii. 2, xxviii. 3; Rev. i. 14). Salmon is 'a hill mentioned in Judg. ix. 48, which was covered over with great thick wood (even according to that passage), so that it might be called a *dark forest, the black or dark mountain.*'—*Luther.* There is no need for supplying any mark of comparison before Salmon: it is rather to be considered as used in a figurative sense for the *land*, just as snow is a figurative expression for the clear brightness of prosperity." According to this exposition these obscure verses give us two ideas: (1) *Rest.* The triumph of the Church will be so complete that it will be followed by perfect and endless rest.

(2) *Prosperity.* The age of warfare ended, the Church will enter upon the everlasting age of progress and beauty and glory.

III. In its celebration. "Great was the company of those that published it." Conant: "The women that publish the glad tidings are a mighty host. Hengstenberg: "Of the female messengers of victory there are a great host." Amongst the Israelites when the army was ordered to war the women cheered the soldiers onward with their songs. And, when they returned victorious, with songs and dances they celebrated the victory. (See Exod. xv. 20, 21;

1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7; *et al.*) And the triumph of the Church of Christ shall not fail of celebration. Those who have fought and suffered, those who have watched and prayed, a countless host of faithful souls, shall join in the exultant songs and festivities of the final triumph. Glimpses of this celebration we have in the Holy Word. But the celebration itself, in its extent and enthusiasm, in its rapture and splendour, shall far surpass our utmost expectation and imagination. And to Jesus—Leader, Saviour, and Sovereign—shall be ascribed "glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

(Verses 15-18.)

We regard these verses as illustrating the glory of the Church of God.

I. It consists in its being the dwelling-place of God. Zion is here spoken of as "the hill which God desireth to dwell in." The Most High dwells in the Church as He does not in the world (Matt. xviii. 20; John xiv. 22, 23). In the Church He reveals His will, puts forth His saving power, manifests the glory of His grace, &c. (see notes on Ps. xlviii. 1-3).

1. *He dwells there of His own sovereign choice.* He "has chosen to dwell" in Zion. "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." Moll: "Sinai and Zion are mountains of God, as Israel is the people of God, not on account of natural advantages, but the Divine election of grace." God dwells in His Church because of His own gracious and sovereign choice.

2. *He dwells there permanently.* "Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever." The ark and the temple have long since passed from Zion; but in the Christian Church, the spiritual Zion, God still dwells, and will do so for ever. In this promise we have a guarantee of the permanence of the Church. "It is impossible," says Renschel, "that the Christian Church should perish; for God is not only a

guest in it, but He dwells therein for ever as the host." Not in wealthy endowments, or worldly power, or imposing edifices, or gorgeous ritual, or eloquent ministers, does the glory of the Church consist; but in the gracious presence of God in her midst.

II. It transcends the utmost glory of the world. "The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan, an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever." Bashan "extended from the 'border of Gilead' on the south to Mount Hermon on the north (Deut. iii. 3, 10, 14; Josh. xii. 5; 1 Chron. v. 23), and from the Arabah or Jordan valley on the west to Salchah (*Sukhad*) and the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites on the east (Josh. xii. 3-5; Deut. iii. 10). This important district was bestowed on the half tribe of Manasseh (Josh. xiii. 29-31) together with 'half Gilead.'" It was famous for the oaks of its forests (Ezek. xxvii. 6), the wild cattle of its pastures (Ps. xxii. 12), and the fertility and beauty of its high downs and wide sweeping plains (Jer. l. 19; Amos iv. 1; Mic. vii. 14). "The hill of Bashan is the high snow-summit of Anti-Lebanon or Hermon, the extreme limit of Bashan, yet really belonging to it." The moun-

tain of Hermon rises to a height of fully 10,000 feet. For conspicuousness and elevation Mount Zion cannot be compared with it. Hermon, the mountain of Bashan, is used here as an emblem of the powerful kingdoms of this world. The hills of Bashan were inhabited for the most part by heathen peoples who were hostile to Israel, as is implied in the inquiry, "Why leap ye, ye high hills?" Conant: "Why watch ye jealously, ye mountain peaks?" Moll: "Why do ye look with envy, ye many-peaked mountains?" "The reference is to lurking, and so crafty and hostile, or envious and jealous looking over at them." The mighty powers of the neighbouring heathen world looked with contempt and lurking hostility upon Israel. And the poet challenges them for the reason of this, and boldly claims for Zion superior dignity and glory than anything of which they could boast, inasmuch as it was selected as the dwelling-place of God. The greatest temporal advantages are poor when compared with spiritual privileges such as those which Israel enjoyed on Zion. Because it is the dwelling-place of the Most High the humble hill of Zion is exalted far above all the mighty and majestic mountains of earth. "It is much more honourable to be holy to God than to be high and great in the world." By reason of its spiritual privileges the Church of God outshines the most glorious kingdoms of the world.

III. It is seen in its security. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, thousands of angels: the Lord is among them." In the Hebrew there is no mention of angels. Hengstenberg translates: "The chariots of God are two myriads, many thousands, the Lord is among them." And Conant: "The chariots of God are myriadfold, thousands upon thousands." Notice—

1. *The poetic representation of the security of the Church.* War chariots were much used for attack and defence by the most powerful nations. "The main strength of the hostile armies, particularly the Syrian, in the war which had just been brought to a termination (comp. 2 Sam. viii. 4; x. 18), lay in

war-chariots." So Mount Zion is represented as surrounded by a countless host of these chariots. So Elisha, when the king of Syria had "sent horses and chariots and a great host" for to take him, was protected; for "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about" him. What are the powers of worldly kingdoms to the powers which do the Divine bidding? "Thousand thousands minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him." The agents which He employs to guard His Church are countless in number and invincible in power.

2. *The secret of the security of the Church.* "The Lord is among them." His presence in their midst makes the defending host fearless and triumphant. The security of the Church is not in its members, or wealth, or organisation, or hosts of angelic defenders; but in the Lord Himself. "Yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. . . . The Lord is among them," is a guarantee of the complete safety of His Church against all the hostile designs and doings of evil powers. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved."

IV. It is seen in its sanctity. "As in Sinai, in the holy place." Or, leaving out the words supplied by the translators: "Sinai, in the holy." Hengstenberg: "Sinai is in the sanctuary." Moll: "'A Sinai in sanctity.' Zion affords a sight as Sinai afforded it when God in His appearance surrounded it with holiness." On Zion as on Sinai God reveals the majesty of His glory; and His presence consecrates and hallows it. The glory of the Church is manifested when she realises the presence of the Lord in her midst, and reflects His glory in the character and conduct of her members. When Christians shine in the beauty of holiness, the glory of the Church will be seen by all.

V. It has been strikingly illustrated. "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Barnes: "The idea is, that God had descended or come

down from His dwelling-place in the case referred to in the psalm, and that having secured a victory by vanquishing His foes, and having given deliverance to His people, He had now returned, or reascended to his seat." We have in the verse—

1. *A great victory.* This is clearly implied in the words, "Thou hast led captivity captive." Primarily, this means that God had achieved a complete victory in the war, and had captured the captives of the enemies, and led them away in triumph. As applied to the Redeemer, it signifies that He triumphed over His enemies, and rescued those whom they had made captive, and bound them to Himself as trophies of His conquest. The Lord Jesus has vanquished the hosts of hell, rescued myriads from the bondage of sin and Satan, and bound them to Himself by the chains of loving loyalty.

2. *Precious spoils.* "Thou hast received gifts for men," &c. Expositors differ in the interpretation of this clause, and that chiefly with reference to **בְּאָדָם**, which the A. V. renders: "for men." Margin: "in the man." Moll: "of men." Alford, Barnes, Conant, Hengstenberg, Olshausen, *et al.*: "among men." "Thou hast received gifts among men, yea, among the rebellious." The Most High is represented by the Psalmist as having taken precious spoils from the enemy, and returning home to distribute them amongst his victorious hosts and people. Even the most refractory were compelled to pay tribute

to this all-conquering Foe. The Lord Jesus Christ having vanquished sin, Satan, and death, bestows the richest gifts upon all who submit themselves to Him.

3. *A glorious ascension.* "Thou hast ascended on high." Hengstenberg: "The *ascending* of God presupposes His *descending* (comp. Eph. iv. 9). It denotes His ascent to heaven, after He had made Himself known on earth in deeds of omnipotence and love, that He may there manage the affairs of His people (comp. at Ps. xlvii. 5)." This ascension was symbolised by the entrance of the Ark into Zion. So our Lord, when He had completed His work on earth, ascended to "the right hand of the Majesty on high," to conduct the cause of His people there.

4. *The grand object.* "That the Lord God might dwell among them." Or, "That Jah God might dwell." The grand end of the victory of God on behalf of His people was that He might dwell amongst them as their heavenly King. And the grand end of the redemptive work and warfare of the Lord Jesus is that He might dwell amongst men as the gracious Sovereign of their being.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the Church learn in what its true glory consists.* 2. *Let it estimate truly the mean and transient glory of the world.* 3. *Let it trust in God and triumph in its security.* 4. *Let it seek to realise His presence more fully, and spread His triumphs more widely.*

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

(Verse 18.)

This passage is applied by the Apostle Paul to the Lord Jesus Christ; we may therefore use it in the way of illustration of some things connected with the exaltation of our Redeemer. Let us notice—

I. The fact of His ascension.

1. *He ascended in human nature.* He assumed that nature as our representative, and as our representative He has entered into heavenly places. He took

our nature in its state of degradation, but He has exalted it, and by His exaltation He has given us the pledge of raising our nature from its state of degradation.

2. *He ascended to heaven.* The place of glory—of God, the Father of glory—of angels—and of the spirits of just men made perfect.

3. *The circumstances of His ascension.* He ascended *visibly*; while He was in

the act of blessing; having led out His disciples as far as Bethany, He lifted up His hands to bestow the parting benediction, and then with uplifted hands, and the word of blessing yet on His lips, He was parted from them. He ascended *in glory*; a procession of "twenty thousand chariots, even thousands of angels," accompanied Him in His upward course, and as they drew near to the heavenly city, the anthem, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," burst forth from the attendant multitude, and amidst the rejoicing of the glorious throng He entered and sat down in the glory of His Father.

II. The triumphs with which it was attended. "He led captivity captive," that is, He led a multitude of captives captive, who had formerly been remarkable for leading others captive. This supposes—

1. *Our Lord's conflict with His foes.* To conquer them He must first encounter them. Satan, sin, and death, were the foes He had thus to encounter.

2. *His conquest of them.* He engaged in the deadly conflict, and did not yield till, "It is finished," showed how it had terminated. That was the shout of

triumph of Him who having trod the winepress alone, had stained all His raiment with the blood of His enemies.

3. *His triumph over them.* "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly," proclaiming, as He passed from the land of His enemies, His conquest and victory. "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

III. The inestimable benefits supplied by it. Let us look at them—

1. *In their nature.* Soon after His ascension Christ bestowed various gifts on the world. The gift of His Spirit—to enlighten, to strengthen, to seal, and perfect.

2. *In their objects.* "For the rebellious." For the human race, rebellious in mind, in profession, in life—for those who might justly have expected the thunders of heaven's wrath to burst upon them.

3. *In their design.* "That the Lord God might dwell among them." The Lord dwells among men by mercy, by His manifold grace, in His eternal glory.—*H. in Sketches of Sermons.*

GOD OUR SALVATION.

(Verses 19, 20.)

The Psalmist here celebrates the praise of God, on the ground that He is the salvation of His people. He is our salvation—

I. In relation to life's burdens.

1. *Man is burdened.* This fact is recognised in the nineteenth verse. Omitting the words which have been supplied by the translators, it reads, "Blessed be the Lord, daily loadeth us, the God of our salvation." Moll translates: Blessed be the Lord day by day! Are we burdened—He, God, is our help." And Hengstenberg: "Praised be the Lord every day, they lay burdens on us, the Lord is our salvation." We are burdened with temporal anxieties, with family solicitudes, with spiritual trials and sorrows, and with the mysteries and responsibilities of life.

2. *God strengthens man to bear his*

burdens. He is "the God of our salvation." "He, God, is our help." He helps us by *His sympathy*. He is burdened in feeling with us. "In all their affliction He was afflicted," &c. He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He helps us by *instruction* as to the meaning and design of our burdens. He helps us by *inspiration*. He inspires the soul with patience—increases its faith—imparts to it more grace, so that the burden shall not prove distressing.

II. In relation to life's perils. "Our God is the God of salvation." Hengstenberg: "God is to us a God of deliverances." The reference is to deliverance from great dangers and troubles.

1. *The life of every man is characterised more or less by perils.* There are

visible and known dangers, and dangers invisible and unknown to us; dangers to our physical and temporal interests, and to our spiritual and eternal interests.

2. *God delivers His people from these perils.* He does this (1.) By removing the dangers, or rescuing His people from them; e.g., Peter from prison (Acts xii. 2-20). Or, (2.) by keeping them safely in the midst of the dangers; e.g., Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in the lions' den, the three Hebrew youths in the furnace of fire. Or, (3.) by giving them the victory over the dangers; e.g., Stephen (Acts vii. 59, 60; and Paul (2 Tim. iv. 6-8).

III. *In relation to death.* "Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death," Conant: "And to Jehovah the Lord belong ways of escape from death." "The reference here," says Moll, "is to ways of deliverance by which we may go forth free with respect to death, or at the expense of death." But how does He thus deliver from death?

1. *By rescuing from imminent death.* When death is threatening and drawing

near He can arrest him in his progress, or turn aside his stroke.

2. *By delivering from the fear of death.* A great end of His incarnation was "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

3. *By giving complete victory over death.* For all who believe in Him, He takes away the sting from death; makes death to them the messenger and minister of life and blessedness; and will complete His glorious triumph by the resurrection of the body. He has "the keys of death and of Hades." "O death, where is thy sting?" &c.

CONCLUSION.—"Blessed be the Lord day by day." The God of so great salvation should receive the heartiest praise. Such great deliverances bestowed upon us call for great gratitude from us. Such constant deliverances should call forth constant praise—"day by day." The highest praise which we can offer for past and present mercies is to reverently trust Him for salvation in the future.

A TERRIBLE CHARACTER AND DESTINY.

(Verses 21-23.)

The connection of this strophe with the preceding is thus stated by Calvin: "Because the Church, attacked on all sides by strong and raging enemies, can obtain nothing otherwise except by a strong and powerful defence, the Psalmist brings in God armed with terrible power, for the destruction of all the ungodly. It is to be observed that all who annoy the pious are called enemies of God, so that we need not doubt that He will interpose for our defence." We have in the text—

I. *A terrible character.* "God shall wound the head of His enemies," &c. Here is—

1. *Great enormity of wickedness.* "His enemies." How fearful are the depravity and guilt involved in being an enemy of God! It is to be an enemy of a Being of perfect holiness, of infinite

kindness; to be an enemy of our best Friend; to trample under foot the most tender and sacred and binding obligations. He who persecutes the people of God is held by Him as an enemy to Himself. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

2. *Great persistence in wickedness.* "One as goeth on still in his trespasses." Hengstenberg: "Him that walks on in his iniquities." If a sinner turn in penitence unto God, he will meet with a gracious reception. God will pardon his transgressions, &c. But here awful perseverance in iniquity, dread progress in sin, are indicated. Such persistence in evil must lead to an appalling doom.

II. *A terrible destiny.* God will bring fearful destruction upon those of His enemies who walk on in their iniquities.

1. *This destruction is complete.* "God shall wound the head of His enemies." Barnes: "The idea is that of complete destruction—as, if the head is crushed, life becomes extinct." (See Gen. iii. 15; comp. Ps. cx. 6.) This idea of utter and dread destruction is expressed in the 23d verse also, by the figure of a fearful slaughter. Persistent wickedness must issue in overwhelming ruin.

2. *This destruction is unavoidable.* (1.) No one shall escape from it *by might*. "God shall wound the hairy scalp," &c. "The hairy scalp," says Moll, "is best understood of a head with luxuriant growth of hair, the sign of the bloom of youth and power." If man persists in wickedness, his utmost might shall be as utter weakness when God ariseth in judgment. "Who may stand in Thy sight when once Thou art angry?" (2.) No one can escape from it *by flight*. "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea." Improperly, as it seems to us, the translators of the A. V. have supplied "*my people*" in this verse. The reference is not to Israel, but to the enemies of Israel. The idea is that none of them shall escape; that they shall find no refuge from the judgment of God. If they have hidden themselves in the mountain forests of Bashan, God will bring them forth and destroy them. Even if they

could take refuge in the abysses of the sea, God would bring them out from thence. The same idea is expressed at greater length by Amos the prophet: "He that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence shall Mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down," &c. (ix. 1-3). If the wicked will not repent, but will persist in wickedness, there is no possibility of escape from the retributions of the Divine judgment. With dread certainty penalty follows transgression; punishment succeeds sin; irresistible wrath shall seize and crush the incorrigible workers of iniquity.

3. *This destruction is solemnly declared.* "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan," &c. "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" The statements of Scripture concerning the punishment of the wicked are not rashly uttered threats, but the calm declarations of the holy and unchangeable God.

Let the wicked take warning, and turn from his evil way. Let him seek for mercy through Jesus Christ. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."

A GLORIOUS PROSPECT.

(Verses 24-35.)

In setting forth this celebration of the triumph of God and His people, and the results arising therefrom, the words of the Psalmist reach beyond the historical occasion which gave rise to them; and to us they seem to throb with the great hope of the conversion of all the heathen world to the God of Israel. There is a clear prophetic ring in some of the declarations of the poet. They unfold to us a glorious prospect. Here is the picture of a time—

I. When the Divine triumphs will be extensively witnessed. "They

have seen Thy goings, O God," &c. Moll: "They have seen Thy processions, O God, the processions of my God, of my King in holiness." The reference is to the triumphal procession in celebration of victory. Men shall see the triumphs of the Divine arm; and shall observe in them two things.

1. *That they are holy.* They have all been achieved "in holiness." We adopt the same translation of *בְּקֹדֶשׁ* as we did in verse 17. As the ages pass it will become increasingly manifest that all the doings of God, the achieve-

ments of His providential government of the world, and the victories of His grace in human souls, are wrought in righteousness and truth and love. His triumphs are those of truth over error, of light over darkness, of justice over oppression, of generosity over selfishness.

2. *That they are the triumphs of the God of the Church.* "The processions of my God, of my King." On the occasion for which the psalm was first composed, it would be seen that the God of Israel possessed Divine power and used it on behalf of His people, that Jehovah was God. And as the victories of the Christ are multiplied, it will become more and more clearly apparent that they are the triumphs of the God of the Church. He who is conquering the world in truth and righteousness and love is the God and King of the Christian Church. The humblest believer may look up to Him, saying, "My God, my King." In a different form we have a similar idea in verse 29: "Because of Thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto Thee." Men will mark His glorious appearances as the God of Israel, and will bow in homage to Him. The day is coming when the triumphs of the King of grace and God of the Church shall be more widely and clearly seen and more carefully observed than ever hitherto.

II. When the Divine triumphs will be joyously celebrated by His people (Vers. 25-27.) This celebration will be—

1. *Exultant.* "The singers went before, the players on instruments after, in the midst were the damsels playing with timbrels." Men and maidens, with voices and instruments of music, and souls and bodies, shall unite to express the enthusiasm of joy. When the predicted triumphs of the kingdom of the Christ are accomplished the rejoicing of men and of angels will be rapturous.

2. *Comprehensive.* "Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, ye of the fountain of Israel," is an exhortation to all the descendants of Israel to unite in celebrating the praise of God. And in the following verse certain tribes and peoples are specially mentioned.

"There is little Benjamin," &c. But why are these tribes selected from the others for special mention? Geographical considerations probably had something to do with the selection; for Benjamin and Judah were in the south, and Zebulon and Naphtali in the north. But a more important consideration is, that these tribes had distinguished themselves in warfare and otherwise. "The first judges belonged to the tribes mentioned, Othniel to Judah, Ehud to Benjamin:" the first kings also, for Saul was from Benjamin, and David from Judah. And the bravery of Zebulon and Naphtali was celebrated in the song of Deborah and Barak (Judg. v. 18). Benjamin is spoken of as "little" because it was among "the smallest of the tribes of Israel" (1 Sam. ix. 21). Benjamin is also spoken of as "their ruler," or "conqueror;" *i.e.*, we think, the conqueror of the enemies mentioned previously, with reference to the victories achieved by the Benjamites under Saul (1 Sam. xiv. 47, 48). The Psalmist further speaks of "the princes of Judah and their council" as present in the festal procession. Instead of "their council" the margin has, "their company." The word is רִנְמָה (with suffix רִנְמָתִם, from רָנָם = to heap together, to collect, as stones), which signifies here a throng or multitude. It is suitably applied to the tribe of Judah as one of the most numerous of the tribes of Israel. So we have here the idea of an immense and comprehensive assembly at this exultant celebration. Princes and people, high and low, persons of all grades and classes, from all the tribes of Israel, join in this triumphant procession. An illustration this of the countless and comprehensive multitude which shall unite to celebrate the approaching triumph of Christ our King. Persons "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," and stations, and ages, shall unite in celebrating His conquests and glories.

3. *Religious.* The spirit manifested by the Psalmist is not proud, self-sufficient, or vain-glorious; but humble, grateful, and trustful. (1.) Past suc-

cesses are attributed to God. "Thy God hath commanded thy strength." The words are addressed to Israel, so that the people may trace their triumphs to their true source." The God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people." (2.) Future progress is besought from God. "Strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us." The people of God are incapable of accomplishing success in spiritual labour, or triumph in spiritual conflict of themselves. Apart from their Lord the Christ, they can do nothing. And when the great triumph to which the Church looks forward is achieved, all the wisdom, and power, and honour, and glory of that triumph shall be ascribed unto Him.

III. When heathen nations shall submit themselves unto God (vers. 29-31). Two or three expressions here require explanation. "Rebuke the company of spearmen." Margin: "Rebuke the beasts of the reeds." Conant, Hengstenberg, *et al.*: "Rebuke the beast of the reeds." Most likely the hippopotamus is here referred to, as the symbol of Egypt, whose emblem is the reed (Job xl. 21; Isa. xxxvi. 6). "The multitude of the bulls," or, "the herd of the strong ones," is a figure used to represent powerful kings or princes. By "the calves of the people" we understand the subjects of these powerful princes. Universal submission shall be made to God. All peoples shall come, bringing tribute unto Him. Egypt and Ethiopia are mentioned not as the only nations that submit unto Him, but as representatives of the great heathen world. All classes shall give in their loyal allegiance unto Him—kings and their subjects, princes and peasants, nobles and plebeians. And when all are subject unto Him, the lovers and instigators of war shall be utterly dispersed. "He scattereth the people that delight in war." Under the reign of "the Prince of Peace" war shall be completely and for ever abolished. "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares," &c. (Isa. ii. 4). This the Psalmist foresaw and

prophetically announced. There were times when heathen peoples brought presents to the kings of the chosen people in acknowledgment of the power and glory of God (2 Chron. xxxii. 23). Many nations of the world have now given their allegiance to the one living and true God. His kingdom is ever growing in extent and power. And ultimately the widest and brightest visions of inspired Psalmists and Prophets shall be fully and splendidly realized.

IV. When God shall be universally praised. In vers. 32-35, the Psalmist summons all the kingdoms of the earth to sing praises unto God, on the grounds of—

1. *His sovereignty.* "To Him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens of old." His sovereignty is *universal*. He rideth in the highest heavens, supreme over all the kingdoms of the world. "Jehovah hath established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all." His sovereignty is *ancient*. "Of old." "God is my King of old." Therefore, let all men praise Him.

2. *His omnipotence.* "Lo, He doth send out His voice, a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God; His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds." Delitzsch: "Give back to Him in acknowledgment and praise the omnipotence which He has and proves. His glory rules over Israel as its defence and confidence. His power, however, embraces all created things, not only the earth, but also the highest region of the heaven. The kingdom of grace reveals the majesty and glory of His redemptive work (Eph. i. 6), the kingdom of nature His all-prevalent omnipotence."

3. *His majesty.* "His excellency is over Israel . . . O God, Thou art terrible out of Thy holy places." His majesty and glory are over His people for their guidance and protection. And His manifestations of His holiness and power are fitted to inspire all men with awe. "Whosoever God showeth His presence, whether in heaven, or in His Church, in any place of the earth, there and from thence He showeth Himself a

dreadful God to such as fear Him not." Therefore, let all the kingdoms of the earth sing praises unto Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. *This subject reminds us of our duty.* It is the duty and the interest of rebels against God to submit themselves to Him. It is the duty and

privilege of the people of God to spread abroad His kingdom and glory wherever they can. 2. *This subject affords us encouragement.* How glorious is the prospect! and how certain of realisation! God's Word, and wisdom, and power, all guarantee it. "Blessed be God!"

PSALM LXIX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief musician upon Shoshannim, a Psalm of David."

"To the chief musician." See the introduction to Ps. lvii. "*Upon Shoshannim.*" See the introduction to Ps. xlv. "*A Psalm of David.*" The Davidic authorship of this Psalm is strongly supported by its close resemblance to other Psalms which are ascribed to David. Both in thought and language it is nearly related to Psalms vi., xxii., xxxi., xxxv., xxxviii., xl., and cix. Ewald: "Our Psalm manifests such a strong similarity, not in the least proceeding from imitation, to Psalms xxxv., xxxviii., and xl., that it must have been composed by the same author." And Hitzig: "The author of the xlth Psalm, whoever he was, must be identically the same with the author of the lxixth." And again: "The similarity between lxix. 32 and xxii. 26, can only be explained by the assumption, that they have been the product of the same mind."

We are unable to determine on what occasion in the life of David the Psalm was composed. Probably it belongs to the time of the rebellion of Absalom. With the exception of the 22d, there is no Psalm which is so frequently quoted and applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament as this one. But the quotations are not of such a character as to require us to adopt a *direct Messianic* interpretation. They are, as Barnes points out, "of so general a character that they do not seem to have been designed to refer exclusively to the Messiah, or even to have had any original reference to Him. The language is such that it *would accurately describe* the events to which it is applied; and the fact that the language is quoted in this manner in the New Testament history does not prove that the Psalm had any original reference to the Messiah." A most formidable objection against the direct Messianic exposition is found in the confession of folly and guilt in ver. 5. Hengstenberg interprets the Psalm as referring not to any individual sufferer, but to the ideal person of the suffering righteous man.

Homiletically we view the psalm as presenting to us, *The cry of the righteous in extreme suffering*, vers. 1-21; *The imperfection of the righteous in extreme suffering*, vers. 22-28; and *The hope of the righteous in extreme suffering*, vers. 29-36.

THE CRY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN EXTREME SUFFERING.

(Verses 1-21.)

The burden of this cry is twofold. We have—

I. **A cry of suffering.** In this wail of the Psalmist we discover—

1. *The nature of his sufferings.* He represents them as arising from (1) *The persecution of his enemies.* "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away." We see here (α) *Their multitude.* "They are more than the hairs of mine head." His foes were an innumerable host. Countless are the enemies of the good. (β) *Their*

malice. "They hate me; they would destroy me." They hated him so fiercely that they sought his utter destruction. "The devil was a murderer from the beginning." (γ) *Their might.* "Mine enemies are mighty." The foes of David were great in authority and power. The righteous have to contend "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (δ) *Their injustice.* They hated him "without a cause;" they were his "enemies wrongfully." The Psalmist had done nothing to provoke them to anger. They compelled him to

give up his own possessions as though he had no right to them, or had gotten them by fraud or violence. Malice is always unjust. It is better to suffer the worst from unjust enemies than by wrong-doing to give to any one reason to be to us an enemy. Such were the enemies who persecuted the Psalmist. And the form of persecution of which he complains most is *slander*. "I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. . . . I became a proverb" (byword) "to them. They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards. . . . Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour. . . . Reproach hath broken my heart." David suffered much from the wicked aspersions and calumnies of his enemies. (See "*The Hom. Com.*" on Ps. xli. 5-9; xlii. 2, 10, &c.) To an honourable man nothing is more bitter and painful than reproach and slander. At this time the Psalmist was smarting severely beneath it. It seemed to assail him in every form and from every quarter. The men of business and the magistrates, who assembled in the gates, spake evil of him. And the drunkard in his degrading revels sang in derision of him. Reproach, shame, dishonour covered and crushed him. And still the good are exposed to the assaults of the slanderer. "Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes."

"Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny."

—Shakespeare.

And still slander assumes many forms, and has many methods; and of these the most subtle are the most perilous.

"The hint malevolent, the look oblique,
The obvious satire, or implied dislike,
The sneer equivocal, the harsh reply,
And all the cruel language of the eye;
The artful injury, whose venom'd dart
Scarce wounds the hearing, while it stabs
the heart;
The guarded phrase whose meaning kills,
yet told,
The list'n'r wonders how you thought it
cold."—Hannah More.

Such are some of the forms and methods of slander. But the sufferings of the Psalmist arose also from (2) *The desertion of his nearest relatives*. "I am

become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children." The expression, "my mother's children," denotes the most intimate relationship. Barnes: "In families where a man had many wives, as was common among the Hebrews, the nearest relationship would be denoted by being of the same *mother* rather than of the same *father*. The idea of the Psalmist here, therefore, is, that his nearest relatives treated him as if he were a stranger and a foreigner." (Com. Job xix. 13-19.) It is probable that in the time of Saul David passed through this painful experience. (Comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 28; Ps. xxvii. 10; and xxxviii. 11.) And still a man may be forsaken by the nearest relatives and friends because he follows truth and righteousness; or he may have to forsake them that he might cleave to Christ. (See Matt. x. 34-39.) The Psalmist was suffering also because of (3) *The failure of human sympathy*. "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Hengstenberg: "I wait for sympathy, and there is none." "The word *sympathy*," says Perowne, "has nowhere been employed by our translators, but it exactly conveys the force of the Hebrew word, inasmuch as it is used of sympathy in joy as well as in sorrow." (See Job xlii. 11; Jer. xv. 5; xvi. 5; xlviii. 17.) No heart was moved with compassion for the suffering poet. He felt himself to be utterly forsaken by mankind. Terrible was his sense of desolation. Worse even than this did men treat him. When he was hungry and thirsty they mocked him by giving him for food a bitter and poisonous herb, and for drink vinegar. By this figure the Psalmist expresses the addition and intensification of his already severe sufferings. The inhumanity of men towards him aggravates his misery. The words of verses 20 and 21 might have been used by "the Messiah upon the cross, who bore the shame of an ignominious death, the reproaches of violating the law, and the slanders of wicked enemies, who died broken-hearted, with no one to pity, alone in His shame and woe," and to whom upon

the cross was given sour wine with an infusion of myrrh, and afterwards vinegar, when He had cried, "I thirst." Let no one place much dependence upon human sympathy or support, or bitter will be his disappointment. But "there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." "I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Let us trust Him always and fully.

2. *The severity of his sufferings.* This is seen in at least four things—(1) *The various figures by which they are expressed.* "The waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." (For remarks on the figures here employed see "*The Hom. Com.*" on Ps. xl. 2; and xlii. 7.) In this psalm the Poet represents the waters as "having come even to his soul," thereby placing his very life in imminent peril. Trouble was not only without him, but within him. His soul was suffering. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" The Psalmist also speaks of himself as heart-broken. "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness." Barnes: "Distress may become so great that life may sink under it, for many die of what is called 'a broken heart.' Undeserved reproaches will be as likely to produce this result on a sensitive heart as any form of suffering; and there are thousands who are crushed to the earth by such reproaches." (2) *The extremity of his peril.* The waters having come even to his soul, his rapid sinking in the mire of the depth, the floods which are overwhelming him, and his broken heart, all indicate the extremity of peril and need. If God do not speedily interpose for him, his sufferings will utterly crush him. If the Divine help come not quickly, it will come too late. (3) *The long-continued duration of his sufferings.* "I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." He had called upon God so long and earnestly that his strength was exhausted and his throat was parched. He had waited and watched for God so long

that his eyes were worn out and dim. Hengstenberg: "The eyes fail: lose their power of vision, when a person keeps them long on the stretch, fixed upon a distant object, in hope of its coming nearer, till the outlines become better defined." M. Henry: "His throat is dried, but his heart is not; his eyes fail, but his faith does not." (4) *The connection of his sufferings with his religion.* "Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach," &c., vers. 7-12. He was reproached for his fidelity to truth and to God. His interest in the cause of God was deep and ardent. "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." The house of God is not the mere temple; but "the temple, as the centre of the whole Israelitish religion." "The true and godly zeal," says Bishop Jewell, "eateth and devoureth up the heart, even as the thing that is eaten is turned into the substance of him that eateth it; and as iron, while it is burning hot, is turned into the nature of the fire, so great and so just is the grief that they which have this zeal conceive when they see God's house spoiled, or His holy name dishonoured." Such was David's zeal for the cause and kingdom of God; and because of it he was ridiculed by the drunkards, reviled by his enemies, and forsaken by his nearest friends and relatives. When he penitently mourned with fasting and sackcloth on account of sin, he was assailed with more bitter reproaches and scorn and satire. All this greatly aggravated his sufferings. Moll: "It is better to suffer for God's cause than to be punished for sins, but it is not easier." Such were the sufferings that called forth this sharp and bitter cry from David. Let not the good man think it strange if he is called to experience severe suffering because of his attachment to Christ and His cause. In such sufferings we join the highest fellowship, and receive the most tender and strong support. (See 1 Peter iv. 12-16.)

II. *A cry of supplication.* In the prayer of the Psalmist we have—

1. *A confession.* "O God, Thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from Thee." Moll: "How is it

consistent that one should be persecuted as *innocent* and yet punished as a *sinner*?" Hengstenberg: "The words are to be taken in their obvious sense, as an acknowledgment of guilt on the part of the Psalmist, which, according to the just judgment of God, had brought upon him the unjust persecution of his enemies." Barnes: "Though conscious of innocence in this case—though he felt that his enemies hated him without cause, yet he was not insensible to the fact that he was a sinner, and he was not unwilling to confess before God, that, however conscious of uprightness he might be in his dealings towards men, yet towards God he was a sinful man. From Him he deserved all that had come upon him. . . . Trial never comes to us from any quarter except as founded on the fact that we are sinners; and even where there is entire innocence towards our fellow-men, God may make use of their passions to rebuke and discipline us for our sins towards Himself."

2. *Petitions.* Of these there are several, but the great object of them all is expressed in the first line of the Psalm—"Save me, O God." He supplicates—(1.) *Complete deliverance.* "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." Thus he seeks deliverance from all the perils and miseries of which he had previously complained. (2.) *Speedy deliverance.* "Hear me speedily." Margin: "Make haste to hear me." Conant: "Make haste to answer me." The peril of his situation was extreme. His need of salvation was urgent. If the Divine interposition were delayed, he felt that he should perish. There are times when such urgency of entreaty is not only admissible, but natural and commendable. (3.) *Representative deliverance.* "Let none that wait on Thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake; let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." Hengsten-

berg: "Comp. on *Psa. xxv. 3*, 'Those who wait on Thee shall not be ashamed, those shall be put to shame who act perfidiously without a cause.' This position would be annihilated were the sufferer to be destroyed. For in him as their representative, or in his case, through his fate, all who wait on God would at the same time be put to shame." Moll: "He may hope in God's favour and help the more confidently as many of the pious look upon him and his fate as typical and instructive. . . . *All* the pious are interested in what concerns *one* of them." If he were left to perish the faith of the godly would receive a terrible shock; but if he were delivered it would be confirmed and invigorated.

3. *Encouragements.* The Psalmist encourages himself in his prayer by several inspiring considerations. (1.) *The knowledge of God.* "Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour; mine adversaries are all before Thee." (a.) He knew the Psalmist—his distress, helplessness, extremity, need. Blessed be His name, suffering and persecution can never drive us beyond the region of His perfect knowledge. (b.) He knew the adversaries of the Psalmist—their multitude, might, malice, machinations. In circumstances like those of the Psalmist reflection on the omniscience of God is most comforting and faith-inspiring to the godly. (2.) *The power of God.* "Lord God of hosts." The title indicates His omnipotence. He is the sovereign of countless and invincible armies. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (3.) *The fidelity of God in His relation to His people.* "O God of Israel." He has engaged in solemn covenant to succour and save His own people. So David pleads, "Hear me in the truth of Thy salvation." The promises of salvation which He has made to those who wait upon Him are charged with encouragement to His people in time of trial. (4.) *The mercy of God.* His kindness is abundantly calculated to quicken and strengthen

confidence in Him. The Psalmist makes mention of (a.) Its *excellence*. "Thy loving-kindness is good." Perowne: "'Good,' i.e., either *sweet*, *comforting*, as in Ps. lxxiii. 3, or *gracious*, *χρηστός* (comp. Ps. cxix. 21)." His kindnesses are *loving* kindnesses; His mercies are *tender* mercies. "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God!" (b.) Its *abundance*. Twice the poet pleads "the multitude of God's mercies. His

mercy is rich and plenteous and free. M. Henry: "There is mercy in God, a multitude of mercies, all kinds of mercy, inexhaustible mercy, mercy enough for all, enough for each; and hence we must take our encouragement in praying." Moll: "He who relies in prayer upon the *mercy* and *truth* of God, has the surest foundation for his *salvation*, and the best pledges of the *hearing* of his prayer."

THE OBJECT, SEASON, AND HOPE OF PRAYER.

(Verse 13.)

The godly man is not turned aside from his prayers because of the reproaches and scoffs of men. Men reviled and ridiculed David because of his religious exercises; but he was not driven from them. "But as for me," he says, "my prayer is unto Thee, O Lord," &c. "Though we may be jeered for well-doing, we must never be jeered out of it." By reason of the scoffings of his enemies, the Psalmist is impelled to seek help in prayer the more persistently and earnestly. As persecution and trials increase, the frequency and fervour of our prayers should also increase. Our text brings before us,

I. The one true object of prayer. "My prayer is unto Thee, O Lord." It is essential that the true object of the prayers of men should be—

1. *Infinite in intelligence*. He must be able to hear the whispers and perceive the desires of all men everywhere. Such intelligence has the Lord God. (See Ps. cxxxix. 1-5; Ezek. xi. 5, *et al.*) He hears prayer.

2. *Approachable*. Not far removed from His creatures; but accessible to every one of them. Not repulsive, but attractive. Such is God as revealed in Jesus Christ. (See John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 18, iii. 12.)

3. *Entreatable*. Man needs not only to be heard, but to be answered also. God can and does answer prayer. Prayer has a real place and function in the Divine economy. "I have a sphere in which," says Dr. Robert Vaughan, "I can use natural law so that good

shall come out of it. By an act of my will, giving command to my muscular skill and force, I can wrest a dagger from the hand of an assassin, or can save a drowning man from his apparent doom. The things of this sort which I can do are numberless; and am I thus free to act in relation to these laws, and has the Almighty no freedom to act in His relation to them? Has He so constructed this great system that it has become His tomb, in which He sleeps the sleep of death, while man lays his living hand upon law everywhere, and makes it do his bidding? The instinct of man through all lands and all time is on the side of prayer, and that instinct cannot be a falsehood—it must embody a truth." Prayer and answers to prayer are great facts in the experience of godly men. (See Ps. xxxiv. 17; Prov. xv. 29; Isa. lxv. 24; Mic. vii. 7; Matt. vii. 7-11; 1 John v. 14, 15.)

II. The season of prayer. "An acceptable time." Conant: "A time of acceptance." Moll: "A time of good pleasure." Hengstenberg: "A time of grace." He presented his prayer to God at a favourable season.

1. *When we suffer wrongfully* is such a season. The Psalmist felt this at this time. No time for prayer can be more acceptable to God, than when we are suffering persecution for righteousness' sake.

2. *When our need is great and greatly felt*. M. Henry: "God will not drive us from Him, though it is need that drives us to Him; nay, it is the more

acceptable, because the misery and distress of God's people make them so much the more the objects of His pity : it is seasonable for Him to help them when all other helps fail, and they are undone, and feel that they are undone, if He do not help them."

3. *When our desire for spiritual blessings is intense.* At such seasons God is very near to us to enrich us with the treasures of His grace. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled."

4. *While the overtures of Divine grace are made to us.* The time of acceptance is that in which God makes His grace known in the offer of His salvation. "Thus saith the Lord in an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee." "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," &c. "Behold, now is the accepted time," &c. The time of acceptance may pass away, and be succeeded by the time of rejection. "Then they shall call upon Me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me." Therefore,

"seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near."

III. **The great encouragements in prayer.** "O God, in the multitude of Thy mercy, hear me, in the truth of Thy salvation." The Psalmist here pleads—

1. *The abounding mercy of God.* Our hope is in God's mercy. (1.) Because we have no merit which we can plead in prayer. (2.) Because of the essential nature of mercy. Mercy is that in God which disposes Him to save the sinful and succour the suffering. "Mercy hath but its name from misery, and is no other thing than to lay another's misery to heart." And (3.) Because of the fulness of the mercy of God. It is inexhaustible, infinite. He "is rich in mercy."

2. *The saving truth of God.* "Hear me, in the truth of Thy salvation." He has promised salvation to all who trust in Him. He is unchangeable. He will fulfil His promises.

In our prayers to God let us hopefully plead His rich mercy and firm truth, and gracious answers shall be ours.

THE IMPERFECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN EXTREME SUFFERING.

(Verses 22-28.)

Let us hear what others have to say concerning the terrible utterances of this section of the psalm. Professor Alexander says : "The imprecations in this verse (22), and those following it, are revolting only when considered as the expression of malignant selfishness. If uttered by God they shock no reader's sensibilities, nor should they when considered as the language of an ideal person, representing the whole class of righteous sufferers, and particularly Him, who though He prayed for His murderers while dying (Luke xxiii. 34), had before applied the words of this very passage to the unbelieving Jews (Matt. xxiii. 38), as Paul did afterwards (Rom. xi. 9, 10). The general doctrine of providential retribution, far from being confined to the Old Testament, is distinctly taught in many of our Saviour's parables. (See Matt. xxi. 41, xxii. 7,

xxiv. 51)." And Professor Stuart ; "Great difficulty is found in such passages by many minds, inasmuch as they seem to be so opposed to the tenor of those passages in the New Testament, which require us 'to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who despitefully use and persecute us.' If indeed these passages in the Psalms are to be viewed as the mere utterance of *private* and *personal* wishes and feelings, it would be utterly impossible to reconcile them with the spirit of the gospel. But is this so? Is David, for example, when he utters such things, to be viewed as doing it merely in the way of giving utterance to his own private personal wishes? It seems to me not ; but David, as king and magistrate, might wish the punishment of the seditious and rebellious ; nay, it would be an imperious duty for him to

punish them. Now, was it lawful for him to pray that the same thing might be done, which it was his duty to do? Could he not express desires of this nature without the spirit of *revenge*? Cannot we wish the robber and the assassin to be apprehended and punished, yea, with capital punishment, and this without being actuated by a spirit of vengeance and a thirst for blood? I trust such wishes are not only consistent with benevolence, but prompted by it. If so, then it may be true that David and other Psalmists had the like views and feelings. And if this *may be* so, is it not probable that it was so? Is not the general character and spirit of their writings a pledge for this?"

We do not regard these statements as satisfactory. They certainly fail to remove the difficulties which many reverent and earnest students of the Sacred Scriptures find in these dread imprecations. Much more helpful, in our opinion, is the statement of Canon Perowne quoted on pp. 163 and 164 of this work.

Let us briefly consider—

I. The imprecations urged. We say imprecations, not predictions; because, as Perowne points out, "the Hebrew optative, which is distinct enough from the simple future, absolutely forbids" our regarding them as predictions.

1. *That the pleasures of life may become a curse to them.* "Let their table become a snare to them; and that which should have been for their welfare, a trap." Conant: "And to the secure for a trap." Hengstenberg: "And their peace, their fall." They had given to the Psalmist gall for his meat, and in his thirst vinegar for his drink; and he now prays that their season of refreshment, when they feel secure and look for pleasure, may be made a snare and a curse to them—"that the blessings of life may become fraught with death to" them.

2. *That they may be deprived of understanding and strength.* "Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake." Perowne: "The *darkening of the eyes* denotes weakness and perplexity, as the enlightening of the eyes (see Ps.

xix. 8) denotes renewed vigour and strength. Similarly the *shaking of the loins* is expressive of terror and dismay and feebleness (Nah. ii. 10; Dan. v. 6). Or the first may mean the depriving of reason and understanding; the second, the taking away of all strength for action."

3. *That they and theirs should be rooted out of the land.* "Let their habitation be desolate; let none dwell in their tents." Let them and theirs perish from the earth.

4. *That they may be confirmed in sin.* "Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into Thy righteousness." Perowne: "Let it all stand against them in Thy book, one sin after another, as committed, not being blotted out, but only swelling the fearful reckoning." (Comp. Jer. xviii. 23.)

5. *That they may be excluded from the kingdom and people of God.* "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." Moll: "The reference is to the book of God (Exod. xxxii. 32), in which God Himself registers every one (Ps. lxxxvii. 4-6), who is appointed to life (Isa. iv. 3), and in this book (Dan. xii. 1), as the citizens of Israel in the genealogical tables" (Jer. xxiii. 30; Ezek. xiii. 9; comp. Luke x. 20; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5; xiii. 8; xvii. 8; xxi. 27).

6. *That God would pour upon them His severest wrath.* "Pour out Thine indignation upon them, and let Thy wrathful anger take hold of them."

Such are the things that God is entreated to do to the wicked enemies of the Psalmist.

II. The reason assigned. "For they persecute him whom Thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom Thou hast wounded." Perowne: "The reason of the imprecation is given, because of the un pitying cruelty which delighted in adding to the pain and affliction of one whom God had already brought low—they tell as if they counted one by one every blow that fell upon him, every cry that he had uttered, only to turn it into mocking" (comp. Ps. lix. 12; lxiv. 5). They persecuted when they should have pitied. Some-

what similar conduct greatly aggravated the sufferings of Job. "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me; O ye, my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?"

This section of the Psalm impresses us with,

First—*The imperfection of the best men.* David was unquestionably one of the best of men; but his life has some foul stains upon it. And this Psalm shows that he was not a perfect man; for he here, as Moll says, "gets into such a carnal excitement, that while he does not contend with God or murmur against Him, but on the contrary, relies upon God, and calls upon Him, yet in hungry zeal he calls down the power of God to the judgment and ruin of those enemies who ignore it. This belongs to that *folly and guilt*, of which the Psalmist is conscious, and is neither to be extenuated nor recommended. For there is a very great difference between obligatory *proclamation* of the Divine judgment, morally justifiable *assent* to the unavoidable consequences of this judgment and holy *joy* in the victory of righteousness on the one side, and passionate *imprecation*, revengeful *cursing*, and an evilly disposed supplication for Divine judgment in order to the temporal ruin and everlasting destruction of certain persons, on the other side. In the latter case, man does not give over retribution to the all-wise and holy God, but of his own will and power interferes with the course of the just government of God, yes, *really anticipates the final judgment*. For this reason it is at least a *zeal for God without knowledge*, even when no revengeful motives come into play, and no personal interests are involved, but when the reference is to such men as put themselves in hostility to God and His word, sacraments, house, glory, and congregation. Even Jesus has not anticipated for individual cases the condemnatory decisions of the final judgment, but has merely proclaimed it as future, and indeed with the pain of love, and in connection with the purpose of His coming not to destroy the souls of men,

but to save them. Accordingly, He censured His disciples for wishing to call down fire from heaven upon those who refused to receive Him (Luke ix. 53-55). . . . We have reason to examine ourselves earnestly, whether, in our *zeal* for God, there is more *wrath* against our enemies, than *love* to His person and *care* for the glory of His house." In estimating these imprecatory utterances of David, we are bound to remember the age in which they were penned. But when every allowance has been made it seems to us only too painfully clear, that the spirit which breathes in them is not good, but evil; not commendable, but reprehensible. In these terrible cursings of his enemies the Psalmist stands before us not as a pattern, but as a beacon; his example in this is not to be imitated, but shunned by us.

Second—*The gradualness of the education of mankind.* God has revealed His will and ways to men slowly, as they have been able to receive the revelation. It took long ages of teaching and experience before men were able to understand such precepts as, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you," &c. In the time of David men were by no means prepared to receive such teaching. In more than one way "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Legislation such as this—"life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, strife for strife," had an important place and work in educating humanity for higher things. The Mosaic legislation helped to prepare man for the Sermon on the Mount. The Jewish Temple was indispensable as a preparation for the Christian Church.

Third—*The truth of the Sacred Scriptures.* The fact that we find utterances like these imprecations in the Bible, so far from militating against its inspiration, is to our mind rather an evidence of such inspiration. Both in historic record and religious poem it faithfully sets forth the sayings and doings of men. When Abraham, "the friend of God," manifests a strange want of faith in Him, and is not strictly truthful,

such failures are impartially recorded. When David, "the man after God's own heart," commits both adultery and murder, the perpetration of these crimes is set down against him, without any attempt to extenuate his guilt. And when the Hebrew religious poets manifest improper feelings and utter improper sentiments; when they give expression to unworthy doubts and fears, or to sinful anger and passionate revenge, such passages are not pruned off the poems, nor are the poems themselves excluded from the volume. This appears to us an evidence of the truth and

trustworthiness of the Bible. And so in these ancient Psalms we have the real utterances of holy men, setting forth their joys and sorrows, their doubts and confidences, their triumphs and temporary defeats, their sinful passions and holy aspirations. Such a book meets a great need of the heart and life of the religious man. And as a fact, this Book of Psalms, giving utterance to these various feelings of the religious heart, has been for long ages and still is one of the choicest and most helpful treasures of all godly souls.

THE HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN EXTREME SUFFERING.

(Verses 29-36.)

The Psalmist passes from terrible imprecations to triumphant anticipations, from passionate revenge to pious hope. Notice—

I. The object of this hope, or what it was that he hoped for.

1. *As regards himself.* "But I am poor and sorrowful; let Thy salvation, O God, set me up on high." He looks in confidence to God for deliverance from his afflicted and mournful condition, and for exaltation to a condition of safety above the reach of his enemies, and the fury of the floods of trial. All righteous sufferers shall certainly in due time be delivered from all their sorrows, &c.

2. *As regards the Church.* "For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah, that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it; and they that love His name shall dwell therein." We regard Zion as an illustration of the Church of God. In his great and assured hope, the Psalmist announces (1) *Its preservation.* "God will save Zion." The Church may be threatened and opposed, but it shall not be overcome; "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (2) *Its progress.* "And will build the cities of Judah." David looked forward to the success and prosperity of the chosen people. The Church of God has a

glorious future—a future of prosperity and increase in purity, possessions, power, &c. Its past history, its present position, and the Divine promises unite to assure the Church of increasing progress, and of complete triumph ultimately. (3) *Its perpetuity.* "That they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also," &c. God will protect His people from generation to generation. Empires once powerful have passed away; heathen religions which once inspired the reverence or awakened the dread of countless multitudes of souls, have perished from amongst men; scientific and philosophical systems which for a long time appeared to be indisputable and permanent, have departed for ever. But the Church of God shall never pass away; for its life of truth and righteousness and love is by its very nature imperishable and immortal.

II. The ground of this hope. The Psalmist rests his assured expectation of salvation on the fact that "the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners." "The poor" are those who are in circumstances of distress and want. The "prisoners" are either those whom He has visited with severe suffering, as in verse 26, or those who are suffering for His sake, as in verse 7. David doubtless includes himself as at this time amongst the needy and the

prisoners. God regards such sufferers with pity, and sends them help when they cry unto Him. A hope of salvation which is based, as this is, on the gracious regard of God for His afflicted people shall surely be fulfilled in the case of every righteous sufferer.

III. The influence of this hope.

1. *It enables him to anticipate his own salvation.* In the midst of his suffering he looks forward to it with assured and joyous confidence; and resolves, as though it were already enjoyed, "I will praise the name of God with a song," &c. Very great and blessed is the power of such a hope. "We are saved by hope."

2. *It impels him to summon the universe to praise God.* "Let the heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein." The Psalmist feels his own utter insufficiency worthily to set forth the praise of God, and, therefore, he calls upon all things everywhere, animate and inanimate, to unite in the celebration.

IV. The anticipated result of the fulfilment of this hope. This is twofold—

1. *The Psalmist will worship God,* vers. 30 and 31. (1) *With spiritual offerings.* "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving." Barnes: "As the result of my deliverance, I will compose a song or a psalm especially adapted to the occasion, and fitted to express and perpetuate my feelings. It was in such circumstances that a large part of the

psalms were composed; and since others besides the Psalmist are often in such circumstances, the Book of Psalms becomes permanently useful in the Church." The worship resolved upon by the Psalmist is (a) *Joyful*—"praise. . . with a song." (b) *Grateful*—"with thanksgiving." (2) Such worship is *more acceptable to God than the most costly material sacrifices.* "This also shall please the Lord better than ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs." Perowne: "The epithets are not merely otiose. The first is mentioned in order to mark that the animal was not under three years old, and therefore of the proper age according to the law; the last as intimating that it belonged to the class of clean four-footed animals, parting the hoof (Lev. xi.); and the meaning is, that the most perfect and valuable of the sacrifices ordained by the law was not to be compared to the sacrifice of a grateful heart." (See "*The Hom. Com.*" on Ps. xl. 6-8; l. 7-15; li. 15-17.)

2. *The pious will be encouraged.* "The humble shall see this, and be glad; and your heart shall live that seek God." The exhibition of the power and faithfulness and goodness of God in delivering His suffering servant, would strengthen the faith, revive the courage, and promote the joy of all godly souls. The deliverance of one is an earnest of the full salvation of all.

Let the suffering righteous seek for and exercise a hope like this of the Psalmist.

PSALM LXX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief musician, a psalm of David, to bring to remembrance." "To the chief musician." (See introduction to Psalm lvii.). "To bring to remembrance."

Barnes: "The Hebrew term used—*לְהַזְכִּיר*, *lehazkir*—means simply for bringing to remembrance, or for reminding. The meaning is, that it is a record for the purpose of reminding; that is, of keeping up the remembrance of something which had occurred in his own experience, and which might be useful to himself or to others; the record of some valuable lessons which had been learned from what he had experienced in the trials referred to." Some are of opinion that the expression indicates that the Psalm was used to remind the Psalmist and others of the wants and circumstances to which it was applied. Others that, inasmuch as God seemed to have forgotten them, the Psalm was intended to bring the Psalmist and people to His remembrance.

The Psalm is almost exactly similar to verses 13-17 of Psalm xl. It seems as though it

had been taken from that Psalm and slightly altered to adapt it to some new occasion. "We do not know what the occasion in either case was, but it would seem that in this instance the Psalmist found, in the closing verses of the 40th Psalm, language which very nearly expressed what he felt on some particular occasion, and which might, by a slight change, be applied to the use for which it was then desired."

Hengstenberg regards this and the following Psalm as forming "one pair, the 70th being like an introduction to the 71st."

PRAYER IN PERSECUTION.

We regard this Psalm as the prayer of a good man suffering from persecution. Consider—

I. The circumstances and condition of the suppliant. Of these he sets before us three main features—

1. *Persecution* (vers. 2 and 3). Here are three forms of persecution. (1) *Active and deadly hostility.* "Them that seek after my soul." There were those who were seeking to destroy the life of the Psalmist. So implacable was their enmity that nothing less than his destruction could satisfy them. (2) *Delight in injury.* "Them that desire my hurt." When loss or trouble, affliction or calamity, came upon the Psalmist, there were those who were glad because of it. If they did not smite him themselves, they rejoiced when others did so. If they did not do him evil, they heartily wished it him. (3) *Scorning.* "Them that say, Aha, aha!" This is the language of reproach and scorn. It also expresses exultation over another, and gratification at the calamities or troubles that befall him. "The damage of the godly is the delight of the wicked; and an enemy to the godly is he that laughs and scorns at the misery of the godly." Christians have to meet with persecution in our own day. The forms of persecution change, but the persecuting spirit remains unchanged from the time of the Psalmist even until now. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

2. *Affliction.* "I am poor and needy." Conant: "I am afflicted and needy." It is the cry of one who was in distress or suffering, and felt himself destitute of all help and resource except in God.

3. *Need.* This is consequent upon the persecution and affliction. The peril arising from his persecutions he needed deliverance from. The stress and strain

of his affliction were so severe that he needed help to enable him to endure them. "Poverty and necessity are very good pleas in prayer to a God of infinite mercy, who despises not the sighing of a contrite heart, who has pronounced a blessing upon the poor in spirit, and who fills the hungry with good things."

II. The prayer of the suppliant.

1. *The Being to whom it is addressed.* "O God, . . . Jehovah, . . . my help and my deliverer." The Psalmist directs his prayer to the Almighty and self-existent One, who is swift to hear and strong to save those who call upon Him. He mentions his personal interest in this great Being. "My help and my deliverer." This confidence was based upon, (1) The promises of God to His people, (2) The former experiences of the Psalmist. Again and again he had found God to be "a very present help in trouble."

2. *The objects which it seeks to attain.* The Psalmist seeks (1) *His own deliverance.* "Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord." Conant: "O God—to my rescue, O Jehovah—to my help, make haste." That which he seeks for himself all men require. Ultimate deliverance from all trials and afflictions, and "grace to help in time of need," are blessings which each and all men should seek for themselves. (2) *The discomfiture of his enemies.* "Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul; let them be turned backward and put to confusion that desire my hurt. Let them be turned back for a reward of their shame that say, Aha, aha!" These expressions are of frequent occurrence in the Psalms. They are used to set forth the frustration and failure of the hopes and projects of the wicked. The number and variety of expressions—

"ashamed, . . . confounded, . . . turned backward, . . . put to confusion"—are intended to give intensity and force to the idea. It is not only lawful but commendable to pray that the designs and hopes of wicked men might be frustrated. (3) *The prosperity of the godly.* "Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee; and let such as love Thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified." The blessedness of the true seeker after God is to find Him, and in finding Him to realize fulness of joy. The blessedness of the lover of the salvation of God is to enjoy it, and enjoying it to give God glory. David prays for the frustration of the hopes of the wicked, and for the fruition of the hopes of the good.

3. *The urgency with which it is presented.* "Make haste to help me,

O Lord, . . . make haste unto me, O God; . . . O Lord, make no tarrying." The Psalmist was so deeply conscious of his own affliction and peril and helplessness, and of his entire dependence upon the help of God, that he prays with almost passionate urgency for the immediate interposition of God on his behalf. He would constrain God to appear for him at once. "He who cannot wait for the help of God, will never gain it; but he must pray for it and may urge his circumstances in prayer." Urgency of need will be followed by urgency of entreaty, and urgency of entreaty by speedy help. "Though death, or danger of it, were never so near, God can come quickly and prevent it; and prayer is a swift messenger, which in the twinkling of an eye can go and return with an answer from heaven."

URGENCY IN PRAYER.

(Verses 1 and 5.)

"Make haste to help me, O Lord. . . . Make haste unto me, O God; . . . O Lord, make no tarrying."

The urgency of the Psalmist implies—

I. **A deep sense of present and immediate need.** This was awakened in him by—

1. *The extremity of the danger to which he was exposed.* His foes were many and were eagerly seeking to destroy his life. His afflictions were severe. He felt that if he were not speedily relieved he must perish.

2. *The limitation of the resources at his command.* Personally he was not able to cope with his enemies, or to bear up under his distresses. He felt that any help which he could expect from man would prove insufficient for his great and pressing requirements.

3. *The conviction that adequate help could be found only in God.* The Psalmist evidently felt that the help of God was the one thing that he required for his support and salvation. If that help were speedily given, all would be well

with him; but if it were withheld, the issue would be his utter overthrow or his destruction—hence the urgency of his prayer.

II. **Apparent delay in answering his prayer.** There is never any real delay in answering prayer; but at times God seems to us to disregard our cries to Him. We cry with David, "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?" &c. (Ps. xiii. 1-4). Or, with Habakkuk, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear?"

1. *During what seems delay to us God may be answering our prayer.* He does not always answer our prayers by granting our requests. During the apparent delay we are kept from sinking, our enemies do not completely triumph over us, we are graciously sustained. In such cases the divine answer to our prayers is not deliverance from trouble, but support in trouble; not the removal of the thorn from the flesh, but, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. xii. 7-9).

2. *The seeming delay may be productive of richest blessing.* (1.) It may teach us the most important lessons. How eminently fitted to teach us the true nature of prayer! Its grand aim is not to induce God to do our will, but to lead us to cheerfully acquiesce in His will; not the gratification of our desires, but the perfection of our being. (2.) It may develop the noblest attributes of character. It may intensify our desires. "Sometimes God seems to delay helping His own people, that He may excite such earnest desires as these" which are expressed in this psalm. Delay may promote patience; may teach and train us to wait calmly and resolutely upon God. "Prayer," says Dr. Reynolds, "however importunate, constant, and fervent, must have its hours of rest, and of the waiting for answer and fulfilment. Like Elijah, we must look from the height of Carmel over the great sea for the little cloud which shall arise and cover the sky, in answer to our prayer. We must open our every faculty to receive the Holy Ghost; we must wait with earnest though patient expectation; we must listen for the gentle knocking of the mighty Stranger at the door of our heart; we must wait amid the discords of the world and the swoop of the storm through the wilderness, and when the strong wind rends the mountains, and the earthquake and the fire follow in wild succession—for the still small voice—we must 'rest in the Lord, and

still wait patiently for Him.'" Moreover, delay may develop trust, may train us to confide in God in times of imminent peril and deep distress. The seeming delay may in many ways be far better for us than a manifest and immediate answer to our prayers. Huntington: "One of our hardest lessons is to find out the wisdom of our hindrances; how we are to be put forward and upward by being put back and put down; encouraged by being rebuked; prospered by being baffled. . . . It needs wakeful watchers, spiritual eyesight, to read that riddle of life, how defeat helps progress; how a compulsory standing still speeds us on; how humiliation exalts;" and how what seems to us the continued silence of God may be the wise and gracious answer to our prayers.

III. *Strong faith in the entreatableness of God.* It is abundantly clear that the Psalmist did not regard God as imprisoned and bound by the laws and order of the universe which He created. Nor did he regard Him as a Being who cannot be moved by any urgency of supplication. A great faith in God as the hearer and answerer of prayer throbs in these impassioned cries for His speedy help. The instinct which finds utterance in such cries points to the reality of prayer—to the fact that it has a real place and function in the universe of God.

PSALM LXXI.

INTRODUCTION.

"This Psalm," says Barnes, "is without a title. It is impossible to determine on what occasion it was composed. There is some plausibility in the supposition that Ps. lxx. might have been placed before it, or in connection with it, as a kind of introduction, or as indicating the character of the Psalms among which it is found; but nothing of certainty can be ascertained on this point. It evidently belongs to the class of Psalms which refer to the trials of the righteous; but it was rather in view of past troubles than of those which were then existing. There is no certain evidence that the Psalm was composed by David. If so, it was when he was advanced in life. There is, indeed, much in the Psalm which would be appropriate to David—much which he might have written; but there is no way now of ascertaining with certainty who was the author. . . . All that is known respecting the occasion on which the Psalm was composed, whoever was the author, is, that it was composed when old age was drawing near, and in view of the trials and blessings of life, as considered from the contemplation of its approaching close.

"It is a Psalm of great value, as describing the feelings of a good man when he is growing old, and is an illustration of what there has been occasion so often to remark in this exposition

of the Book of Psalms, that the Bible is adapted to all the conditions of human life. In a book professing to be a revelation from God, and in a world where *old age*, with its trials, its infirmities, its recollections, and its hopes, must be so prominent in the actual state of things existing, it would have been unaccountable if there had been nothing to illustrate the feelings of those in advancing or advanced years—nothing to suggest the kind of reflections appropriate to that period of life—nothing to cheer the heart of the aged man, and to inspire him with hope—nothing to prompt him to recall the lessons of the past, and to make use of those lessons to prepare him for the future; even as, in a world so full of trial, it would have been strange if there had been nothing to comfort the mind in affliction, and to enable men to derive proper lessons from the experiences of life. This Psalm, therefore, is one of the most valuable portions of the Bible to a certain class of mankind, and may be to any of the living, as suggesting the proper reflections of a good man as the infirmities of age draw on, and as he reviews the mercies and the trials of the past.”

Homiletically we view the Psalm as presenting—*Trust and prayer*, vers. 1-3; *The precious recollections, present trials, and glorious resource of an aged saint*, vers. 4-13; and *The triumphant faith of an aged saint*, vers. 14-24.

TRUST AND PRAYER.

(Verses 1-3.)

These verses, which form the introduction to the Psalm, are borrowed, with slight changes, from Ps. xxxi. 1-3; and as they have been expounded in that place, our remarks on them will be brief. We have here—

I. The good man's trust. “In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.” He confides—

1. *In a Divine Person.* “In Thee, O Lord,” &c. Not in mere law, or order, or fate, or force. The things which these terms set forth satisfy neither the demands of the intellect nor the cravings of the heart. They are cold, heartless abstractions. We cannot confide in them. But the Psalmist trusts in the personal God—a Being of infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, love, &c. In Him both the intellect and the heart may repose.

2. *In a Divine Person sustaining personal relations to His creatures.* “Thou art my rock and my fortress.” The Most High is not far removed from His creatures, or indifferent to their needs and interests. He guards their interests, supplies their needs, and graciously cares for them individually. He encourages every man to claim a personal interest in Him, and in His protection and provision. Without presumption we may say, “Thou art my rock,” &c.

3. *In a Divine Person who has given gracious assurances of salvation to His people.* “Thou hast given command-

ment to save me.” Hengstenberg: “Who hast ordained to help me.” God has given many gracious and faithful promises of salvation to all those who trust in Him. Such, then, is the object of the good man's trust as presented to us by the Psalmist.

II. The good man's prayer. “Let me never be put to confusion,” &c. He supplicates—

1. *Divine audience.* “Incline Thine ear unto me.” It is a request that God would bestow upon him His gracious attention. The lisping prayer of the little child, the broken sob of the penitent, the sigh of the sorely burdened spirit, and the faint whisper of the dying, each and all are heard by Him. No uprising of holy desire or utterance of need escapes His notice, or fails to secure His regard.

2. *Divine deliverance.* “Deliver me in Thy righteousness, and cause me to escape, . . . and save me.” He was in great danger by reason of the malicious schemes and enterprises of his enemies. They were seeking his life. He looks to God for deliverance from their subtlety and strength, feeling that He was too righteous a Being to fail in delivering one who trusted Him so fully, seeing that He had promised salvation to all who confide in Him. When trusting in God we may plead His righteousness for salvation.

3. *Divine protection.* “Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may

continually resort." Hengstenberg: "Be to me a rock of salvation, to which I may come continually." This seems to us a very comprehensive petition. He asks that he may find in God (1) *His home*. "My habitation." God Himself is the true home of the soul. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." (2) *His secure home*. "My strong habitation." "A rock of habitation." A rock against which the tumultuous waves of persecution shall spend themselves in vain. He that dwells in God has omnipotence for his defence. (3) *His secure home always accessible*. "Whereunto I may continually resort." At all times and in all circumstances we may take refuge in God, feeling assured of protection and welcome.

4. *Divine vindication*. "Let me never be put to confusion." It is a prayer that God would vindicate the confidence which he had reposed in Him. If the Psalmist failed to find salvation in God, his highest hopes would be wrecked, his most sacred and precious interests would be lost; he would be covered with confusion and shame. If it be reposed in God, our confidence will never become our confusion. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

CONCLUSION.—Mark the relation between trust and prayer. There can be no true prayer without faith. Prayer is not the cry of despair, but the aspiration or entreaty of hope. And wherever there is genuine trust in God it will find expression in prayer to him.

THE PRECIOUS RECOLLECTIONS, PRESENT TRIALS, AND GLORIOUS RESOURCE OF AN AGED SAINT.

(Verses 4-13.)

In this section of the Psalm three things require notice:

I. The precious recollections of an aged saint.

1. *Of a life of trust in God*. "Thou art my trust from my youth." From his earliest years God had been the object of his hope. The Psalmist does not boast of this. He "does not in the least praise his own *faith*, but the *grace* of God, which he had experienced from his childhood." We know that in early life David exercised strong confidence in God. Blessed are they whose old age is soothed and brightened by memories of early trust in God, and consecration to Him.

2. *Of a life sustained by God*. "By Thee have I been holden up from the womb; Thou art He that took me out of my mother's bowels." On נִסְּךָ (Niph. of נָסַךְ, to support, to lean) Perowne says: "This is an expression wonderfully descriptive of what faith is, and of what God is to those who trust in Him. He is a father who bears them in His arms and carries them in His bosom; they are as children who

lean all their weight upon Him, and find their sweetest rest in His supporting hand. This is the very idea of faith, according to its Hebrew signification. When it is said in Gen. xv. 6, that 'Abraham believed God,' it means literally, 'he leaned upon God.' Looking back upon his life the Psalmist could say,

"Thy mercy heard my infant prayer,
Thy love, with all a mother's care,
Sustained my childish days:
Thy goodness watched my ripening youth,
And formed my heart to love Thy truth,
And filled my lips with praise."

—Grant.

David had recollections of the gentle and strong hand of God supporting him through all his life. His age was sustained and cheered by memories of the rich and constant goodness of God to him. The stream of the Divine blessing had never ceased to flow for his refreshment and support. Whatever or whosoever had disappointed him, God had never failed him. Blessed are they who in old age have a retrospect like unto this.

II. The present trials of an aged

saint. Even the old age of the good is not always exempt from trial. We are never beyond the reach of the storm while we are in this world. The old age of David was darkened by trouble by reason of the great sins which stain and mar one period of his life. See 2 Sam. xii. 10, 11. In his old age he "was tried by great and sore troubles, by debility of body (1 Kings i. 1-4), and by the rebellion of Adonijah, his son usurping his throne and endeavouring to supplant Solomon (1 Kings i. 5-10), and by the treachery of Abiathar and Joab" (1 Kings i. 18, 19). The trials which he mentions in this Psalm arose from his enemies. He sets before us—

1. *Their character.* "The wicked, the unrighteous and cruel man." His foes were unjust, malignant, and violent men. Against foes of such a character he might well appeal unto God.

2. *Their aim.* "They lay wait for my soul." They watched and waited to take away his life; they sought to destroy him. An illustration of the spiritual foes of the good.

3. *Their method.* This comprised (1) *Slander.* "Mine enemies speak against me; . . . saying, God hath forsaken him." "The tongue of slander is never tired. In one way or another it manages to keep itself in constant employment. Sometimes it drops honey and sometimes gall. It is bitter now, and then sweet. It insinuates or assails directly according to the circumstances. It will hide a curse under a smooth word, and administer poison in the phrase of love. Like death it 'loves a shining mark.' And it is never so voluble and eloquent as when it can blight the hopes of the noble, soil the reputation of the pure, and break down the character of the brave and strong. And how much of this vile work is done in one way and another in society! . . . It is done to the hurt and agony of many a soul. It is done by a look sometimes, by the curl of a lip, by the wink of an eye, by an insinuation, a phrase of suspicion, by the dexterous and malicious handling of a rumour—in a thousand ways are men and women stung by the poisoned arrow shot from the devil's

tongue of slander." David suffered most acutely and often from the calumnies of his enemies. See our remarks on Ps. xli. 5-8; xlii. 3. (2) *Subtlety.* "They take counsel together." They were combined and designing; and endeavoured to form such plans and adopt such methods as would enable them with the greatest certainty to accomplish their cruel and malicious designs. They were crafty as well as calumnious. (3) *Violence.* "Persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him." They imagined that the Psalmist was abandoned by God, that his defence was withdrawn, and that they might, therefore, pursue and seize him. They employed force against him, as well as subtlety and slander. The good have their enemies now. These enemies are malicious, cunning, and strong. They aim at their spiritual destruction. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary," &c.

III. The glorious resource of an aged saint. The aged Psalmist, in his trials, turned to the Lord God.

1. *His confidence.* "Thou art my hope, O Lord God; Thou art my trust from my youth. . . . Thou art my strong refuge." His confidence was (1) *Of long continuance.* From his youth he had reposed his trust in God. His faith amid the trials of old age was sustained by a long, diversified, and rich experience. Present confidence was encouraged and strengthened by past experience of great fulness and preciousness. His confidence was (2) *Exultant.* "My praise is continually of Thee. . . . Let my mouth be filled with Thy praise and with thy honour all the day." His trust in God enabled him to triumph over his enemies. Faith made him songful even in the midst of his trials.

2. *His prayer.* (1) *As regards his enemies.* "Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul, let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt." Musculus: "His desire is, that they may be confounded and fail, that they may be covered with disgrace and shame. He seeks nothing beyond the frustration of their attempts, that they may begin to be

ashamed, and have no cause for boasting that they came off victorious." Caryl: "Shame ariseth from utter disappointments. If hope deferred causeth shame, then much more hope destroyed. When a man sees his hopes quite cut off, so that he can no way reach the thing he looked for, shame takes hold of him strongly." Spurgeon: "How confounded must Pharaoh have been when Israel multiplied, despite his endeavours to exterminate the race; and how consumed with rage must the scribes and Pharisees have become when they saw the Gospel spreading from land to land by the very means which they used for its destruction." Satan and all the enemies of the good shall be thus confounded. Their designs shall be utterly defeated, &c. (2) *As regards himself.* He seeks for (a) *Deliverance from his enemies.* "Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man." He prays to be rescued from the strong grip of his wicked foes. (b) *The continued presence and help of God.* "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me

not when my strength faileth. . . . O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste for my help." The kindness and faithfulness of God to the Psalmist in youth and maturity encourage him to seek His presence and aid in the time of old age and failing strength. "He is a Master that is not wont to cast off old servants." David feels that if God be near unto him all will be well with him. "Nearness to God is our conscious security. A child in the dark is comforted by grasping its father's hand."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the young learn the importance of early piety.* It is the best preparation for the trials of declining years. 2. *Let the aged, with failing faculties and growing infirmities, seek help and comfort in God.* "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all ye the remnant of the house of Israel; ye that have been borne by Me from the birth, that have been carried from the womb: And even to your old age, I am the same; and even to grey hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry, and will deliver you."

THE AGED SAINT AND HIS GOD.

(Verse 7.)

Consider—

I. What the Psalmist said of himself. "I am as a wonder unto many." He was led to say this from the review which he had taken of his own history. The history of David was singular. He had been raised from being a shepherd to be the king of Israel. The deliverances which had been wrought for him showed that the hand of God had been with him. And in his old age, having reigned over the people for many years, in reviewing his life, he said, "I am as a wonder unto many."

1. *It is proper to review past experiences.* (1) *As to the methods of grace.* Every good man is the subject of grace, and has been preserved in his course by supplies of grace; and it is proper for him to review what God has done for him. (2) *As to the conduct of Providence.* This is proper in every stage of life, but especially in old age. Reflect

upon the many blessings which a kind Providence has bestowed, the many deliverances which you have experienced, &c.

2. *It is profitable to review past experiences.* (1) It produces *humility*, because of the little improvement we have made, &c. (2) It inspires *gratitude*, because of many mercies, many kind interpositions of Providence, &c. See Gen. xxxii. 10; 2 Sam. vii. 18. (3) It encourages us to *trust* in God. Reflecting upon the past had this effect upon David, as we see in this Psalm (vers. 1, 14–24).

II. What the Psalmist said of his God. "Thou art my strong refuge."

1. *The manner in which David speaks of God.* "Thou art my strong refuge." (1) If we think of the perfections of God we shall see that we may view Him as a "strong refuge." His *power* is almighty; His *wisdom* is infinite, to guide, &c. He is *always* present, faith-

ful, unchangeable, &c. (2) His people in all ages have found him to be their "strong refuge."

2. *In all circumstances His people may make Him their refuge.* (1) *In troubles.* These are different in their kind with different persons. Some have poverty, others losses, others family trials, others bereavements, others unfaithful friends, &c. But there is no trouble but the believer may bring it to his God. (2) *In spiritual trials, e.g.,* wounded conscience, Satanic temptations, painful conflicts, &c. (3) *In old age.* The increasing infirmities of old age, the loss of many friends who cheered and strengthened us in former years, the certainty that the days of labour and usefulness are drawing to a close, render it of the greatest importance to have God for our refuge. (4) *In death*

itself. When the powers of nature fail, when the last enemy comes, God will be the refuge of His people. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

CONCLUSION.—1. *How important to live so as to enjoy the privilege of having God for a refuge!* If we are walking in the way of holiness we shall enjoy this privilege. 2. *To enjoy this privilege we must exercise faith.* In the trials of life the promises of God are a source of encouragement and comfort, but we can enjoy the consolation which they afford only by faith. 3. *How great is the importance of true religion!* If we neglect religion we shall have our trials, but we shall have no adequate refuge. Seek an interest in Christ, and the Lord will be your God.—*Abridged from an unpublished MS.*

THE CRY OF THE AGED.

(Verse 9.)

This is the cry of trembling, tottering age to man, as well as to God. Among the very saddest of human experiences is the decay which is the harbinger of death. Decay is the first bitterness of death. I believe that, at last, in the act of dying the bitterness of death is already past. There is a great physical preparation for dying, when the moment has at length come. The worn-out body, weary with its long struggle, sinks at last into the arms of death without a tremor; it is tired, it longs to be at rest. It is the long struggle of the vital power, while its vigour is still capable of the effort, which is so hard to endure, so sad to behold. The strong man worsted, but yielding slowly, and fighting every inch against the sure, inevitable progress of decay. The eye daily a little dimmer, the limbs a little feebler, &c. . . . It is a dark, sad theme, the sufferings and miseries of the long decline. That God should suffer it must have deep reasons. . . . Consider—

I. **The phenomena of human decay.** "The outer man decayeth." At both ends of life man is the most helpless and the weakest of the creatures. For nearly

one-third of his pilgrimage, law and fact hold man to be an infant, dependent on elders, that is, cast upon the care and guidance of his fellows; and if he lives out his span, and fulfils the natural course, he is certain of years of the same dependence before his death. With this grand difference, that the great moving principle of the one ministry is memory, the inspiration of the other is hope. The aged have memory chiefly to look to, the young have hope. Among the finer spirits, the men and women of high culture and Christian feeling, there is a beautiful sacredness about the hoary head which wins for it abundant care and honour; but alas! for the old and weary among the great mass of mankind. . . . Take infirmity in its best condition, where it is regarded most reverently and handled most tenderly, and there is a very sad side to it. How much more when the surroundings are hard and selfish, and the poor worn-out pilgrim is made to see very plainly that his life is a burden to those for whose nurture the strength of it was spent; and that declining strength will be but the signal for new hardships, insults,

and wrongs. When circumstance is all that is happy, the *thing* remains—the most painful of spectacles, the most bitter of experiences—the strong frame grown weak as an infant's, and dropping piecemeal to dust. The brain that was once regal in power wandering wearily after lost thoughts, and failing to grasp them, looking forth from perplexed and bewildered eyes with that look which is so hard to meet without tears—the look of a mind conscious that it is losing the power to hold its own. The lips babbling idle, incoherent words, the hands groping vaguely after familiar objects, the limbs bending beneath the weight of the shrivelled form whose lusty manhood they bore so joyously about its work. The eyes growing dim, as though a thick veil were dropped over the creation; the cheerful and courageous spirit querulous and suspicious; all the noble moral qualities, the self-denial, the wisdom, the tenderness, the courage, the hope, that rendered in their prime such noble ministry to others, seeming to share the body's decay, and passing slowly under utter eclipse. The mind, the soul, to the eye dying with the body, becoming puling, feeble, fretful as a child's. It is "a sair sight" to those who have to watch it, a bitter experience to those who have to pass through it.

II. The reasons of this law of physical decay as far as we can explore it. Why should such a law reign in a world which is under the wise rule of a merciful and loving God?

1. *To drive home the lessons which God is ever seeking to teach us about sin.* Death as it reigns on earth is not translation—the calm passage of a spirit from an inferior to a superior sphere. Nor is it intended to look like translation. It is a curse which sin has inflicted on the world. It is the devil's work, not God's. Death, as we know it now, though it is God's judgment, is the cursed work of evil. And God intends that it shall look like it. There is no hiding of any of its black features. Sin is corruption of the spirit, paralysis of every faculty of the being. God shows us the corruption, the paralysis of force, in the phenomena of bodily decay. It is God's

solemn sermon upon sin. What you see the devil do for a body, that believe the devil is doing for a soul.

2. *To develop the noblest qualities of the human spirit by the ministries which sickness, suffering, and decay call forth.* Abolish suffering and decay God will not. He maintains it while this sinful world endures, as His strong witness against sin. But he seeks to make it the occasion of a higher, richer blessing than would be found even in its abolition. The stern law grows beautiful as it calls forth tender and unselfish ministry. There is something higher and more blessed than not to suffer. It is to suffer surrounded by exquisite ministries of love. . . . God has made us so weak in birth and in death, because we have men and women and not beasts around us. And it is in caring for the helpless, nursing the weak, tending the sick, and bearing the burdens of the sad, that men and women are to grow like God.

3. *That He may strengthen faith and hope in immortality.* Death is terrible that life may be beautiful. The destroyer is suffered to ravage that the deliverer may be welcomed and blessed. God's judgment is not unto death, but unto life. But it is always *through* the judgment, and not by escaping it or turning it aside, that He saves. So through death the great Captain of deliverance destroyed death. . . . The long weary decay of age, the declining strength of which the Psalmist speaks so touchingly, has but one alleviation, the tender, devoted ministry of our loved ones; it has but one consolation, the hope of immortality. As we watch it, as we suffer it, that hope becomes the soul's sheet anchor. When death wears his ghastliest dress of terror, we cling but the more closely to Him who has taught us to triumph—yea, to exult over death. Don't moan like a trembling dove when death has his grip on you, after Hezekiah's fashion. Lift up your voice and sing a psalm like Paul inspired by Christ. "For which cause we faint not; but though our natural man perish," &c. (2 Cor. iv. 16—v. 4.)

III. The duties which spring out of

the facts and considerations on which we have dwelt.

1. *The tender care of the old and grey-headed.* God commits them to our ministry. He makes us responsible for their charge. If we will not joyfully bear that burden, it is His counsel, His charge, His gift which we despise. . . . There is nothing so noble, nothing so beautiful, as the ministry of vigour to weakness, health to sickness, growth to decay, youth to age. There is nothing that God marks more earnestly, nothing that will bear richer fruit in heaven. Let the plea of grey hairs be all-power-

ful. Bear brightly the mistrust, the fretfulness, the dullness. Let the whisper of the aged lips, and the sign of the aged hand, be like royal commands to you.

2. *Let us press home on the hearts of the aged with double earnestness the Gospel which brings to light life and immortality.* Blot out that Gospel, and it is all pure agony and misery. Life is a curse, death is a curse, all is a curse; and there is no hope. "But now is Christ risen from the dead," &c. (1 Cor. xv. 20-22, and 55-57; 2 Cor. iv. 17).—*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A. Abridged from "The Christian World Pulpit."*

THE TRIUMPHANT FAITH OF AN AGED SAINT.

(Verses 14-24)

The tone of the Psalm changes remarkably. For despondency and fear we have cheerfulness and hope; and the hymn closes with an outburst of exultant praise. Consider—

I. The prayer of faith. (Vers. 17, 18.) Notice—

1. *The blessing sought in the prayer.* "Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." Margin—"Unto old age and grey hairs." A correct rendering is—"And even to old age and grey hairs, O God, forsake me not." The Psalmist seeks that the gracious and helpful presence of God should be continued unto him, to the very close of a long life.

2. *The ground from which the prayer rises.* "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works." In his prayer the Psalmist is encouraged by (1) God's doings for him in the past. From his youth God had instructed and guided him. (2) His celebration of those doings. He had made known to others the wondrous doings of God on his behalf.

3. *The reason by which the prayer is urged.* "Forsake me not, until I have showed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power to every one that is to come." Margin—"Thine arm." "The arm of the Lord is the symbol of His executive power and works. (Comp.

Isa. lii. 10; liii. 1; Ezek. iv. 7.) The generation that has come up in the place of his own generation, which is passing away, first comes before his mind, and then his vision deepens and widens, taking in all the coming generations to whom he would publish the mighty deeds of God." He sought for the continuance of the Divine presence and help that he might still be able to edify his fellow-men and honour his God. (See these verses more fully treated in two sketches given below.)

II. The anticipation of faith. The Psalmist confidently looks forward to—

1. *Complete deliverance from severe trials.* "Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth." Conant: "Thou, who hast made us see troubles great and sore, wilt again revive us, and from the abysses of the earth wilt bring us up again." Notice—(1) The best of men may suffer severest trials. The Psalmist represents himself and others as dead and buried, or sinking in the deep abysses of the earth. Their troubles seemed overwhelming and ruinous. (2) Good men in their trials must recognise the hand of God. He had caused them to see those great and sore trials. No trial can befall us without His permission. (3) Good men in their trials may cherish an assurance

of deliverance. He is able to bring even the dead to life, and to raise from the deepest and most dreadful abyss all who call upon Him. He will not forsake those who trust in Him. The trouble of the good shall pass away like clouds, and leave their heavens serene and beautiful.

2. *The realisation of the Divine exaltation and comfort.* "Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." Hengstenberg: "And shalt turn Thyself and comfort me." This is more than complete deliverance from trial. It is the assurance that through trial the people of God rise to greater elevation and joy. "Sometimes God makes His people's troubles contribute to the increase of their greatness, and their sun shines the brighter for having been under a cloud." Through much tribulation lies the path of the good to greatness and glory. We must bear the bitter suffering and fight the stern battle; and, by the blessing of God, the struggle and pain shall contribute to our strength and joy. God will "make us glad according to the days wherein He has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." Such was the confident anticipation of the Psalmist.

III. *The resolution of faith.* David declares his purpose—

1. *To continually hope in God.* "But I will hope continually." "Hope," says Dr. Punshon, "is a marvellous inspiration, which every heart confesses in some season of extremest peril. It can put nerve into the languid, and fleetness into the feet of exhaustion. Let the slim and feathery palm-grove be dimly descried, though ever so remotely, and the caravan will on, spite of the fatigue of the traveller and the simoom's blinding, to where, by the fringy rootlets, the desert waters flow. Let there glimmer one star through the murky waste of night, and though the spars be shattered, and the sails be riven, and the hurricane howls for its prey, the brave sailor will be lashed to the helm, and see already, through the tempest's breaking, calm waters and a spotless sky. Oh! who is there, however hapless his

lot or forlorn his surroundings, who is beyond the influence of this choicest of earth's comforters—this faithful friend which survives the flight of riches, and the wreck of reputation, and break of health, and even the loss of dear and cherished friends?" The Psalmist resolved that, however painful his circumstances and condition, and whatever the number and power and malice of his enemies, he would hope in God. While God lives, His people have every encouragement to hope in Him.

2. *To continually praise God.* Notice—(1) *The object of the Psalmist's praise.* "I will praise Thee, O my God—Thou Holy One of Israel." Here are four points—(α) *The personality of God.* "Thee, O my God." (β) *The unity of God.* "One." "The Lord our God is one Lord." (γ) *The perfection of God.* "Thou holy One." Holiness in man has been well defined as "the symmetry of the soul;" and by holiness as attributed to God we understand the summation of His perfections. (δ) *The relation of God to His people.* "O my God, Thou Holy One of Israel." He is in covenant relations with His people. All who trust in Him are interested in Him and related to Him. (2) *The subjects of His praise.* These are (α) *The mighty deeds of God.* "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." Conant: "I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord Jehovah." Hengstenberg: "I will come with the deeds of the Lord." Alexander: "The common version—'I will go in the strength of the Lord God,' is at variance with the usage both of the verb and noun, as the former does not mean to go absolutely, but either to enter or to come to a particular place, expressed or understood. The ellipsis here may be supplied from Psalm v. 7, and lxi. 13, in both which places the same verb denotes the act of coming to God's house for the purpose of solemn praise, and in the second passage cited is followed by the same preposition, 'I will come into Thy house with burnt offerings,' i.e., I will bring them thither. This sense agrees with the vow to praise God in the two preceding verses, and with the pro-

mise of commemoration in the other clause of the verse. It also enables us to give the noun its usual sense of God's exploits or mighty deeds" (see Ps. cvi. 2, and Deut. iii. 24). God had done great things for the poet and the people, he was confidently anticipating that He would still achieve mighty and glorious deeds for them, and he resolves to publicly and thankfully celebrate these exploits. (β) *The righteousness of God.* "My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness. . . . I will make mention of Thy righteousness, of Thine only." He speaks of the righteousness of God's doings. His deeds were as just as they were mighty, as equitable as they were wonderful. The Psalmist resolves to praise the righteousness only of God: not his own righteousness, or strength, or skill, but the perfect righteousness of the Lord his God. (γ) *The salvation of God.* "My mouth shall show forth Thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers." God's great might is exerted for the salvation of His people. His saving acts are innumerable. (Comp. Ps. xl. 5.) "God's righteousness and His salvation are here joined together; let no man think to put them asunder, or expect salvation without righteousness." This is an inexhaustible theme of praise to the godly man. (δ) *The faithfulness of God.* "I will praise Thee, even Thy truth, O my God." By the "truth" we understand especially the truth of the Divine promises. "He is faithful that promised." Such are the high and fruitful topics which the poet resolved to celebrate. (3) *The reason of his praise.* This is to a great extent contained in the object and subjects of his praise. He who is mighty, righteous, faithful, and holy, and who works for the salvation and exaltation and joy of his people, is worthy of all praise. But the Psalmist praises God because He delivers him from sore distresses, and from the enemies who sought to kill him. Faith enables him to realise his salvation as though it were already wrought out for him. "For they are confounded, for

they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt." To the poet this is so certain that he speaks of it as a thing already accomplished. He praises God for it. His praise is the expression of his gratitude. (4) *The manner of his praise.* He resolves to praise God. (α) *Publicly* (ver. 16). "I will come" into Thy house "with the mighty deeds of the Lord Jehovah; I will make mention," &c. In the public congregation the Psalmist would thankfully recount the glorious deeds of God, and celebrate His praise. (β) *Songfully.* "Unto Thee will I sing." (See remarks on Ps. lix. 16.) (γ) *With instrumental accompaniment.* "I will praise Thee with the psaltery; unto Thee will I sing with the harp." (See remarks on Ps. lvii. 8.) (5) *The spirit of his praise.* "My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto Thee; and my soul, which Thou hast redeemed." His praise was not formal and cold, but warm and hearty; not merely with his "lips," but also with his "soul." His spirit was exultant. To him worship was an inspiration and joy. (6) *The continuousness of his praise.* "My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day. . . . My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long." True praise is not an occasional act, but an abiding habitude; not the service of the lips, but the spirit of the life. He worships God truly who worships Him constantly.

CONCLUSION. — How wonderful and divine is the power of true godliness! It enables man to triumph over the infirmities of declining years, the sharp sorrows of life, and the bitter persecutions of mighty and malignant foes. It makes man victorious in the very midst of his enemies. It lifts him in spirit above the storm and the clouds into serene and sunny regions. The true Christian surveying the most adverse circumstances and the most hostile forces can shout in triumph, "in all these things we are more than conquerors." Is this spirit—this trustful, victorious, Divine spirit—ours?

AN OLD MAN'S RETROSPECT.

(Verses 17, 18.)

I. The Psalmist's scholarship.

David was an instructed believer, and more of the kind are needed. Converted people should be learners. Some seem to jump into salvation on a sudden; but they who have not first learned should have the sense not to teach. Ritualism and scepticism would not have spread had there been a wider diffusion of knowledge, for error and ignorance go hand in hand. David went to school from his youth; he was mighty in the Scriptures as they then existed. Let us, then, read our Bibles. In the old days, there was nothing the Romanists so much dreaded as the Catechism. Then let the experienced be teachers of others. As regarded David, the Lord taught him; he was taught by the prophets, and also by Providence. He learned lessons in the camp and in the world. It is a blessed thing when God is our teacher, and His school-room is large enough for all. Further, David began early. It is necessary to be taught early; for the sooner we come to Christ, the less we have to unlearn. We grow like early planted trees, and have none of those horrid remembrances which are a cross to many who are reclaimed late in life. Hence the young promote their own happiness by entering the Church early to grow up in it. If they would preserve a bright eye and an elastic step, they must cleave to Christ in youth.

II. The Believer's occupation.

David's occupation was to declare God's works. This was the kernel; all else was but the shell. Some appear scarcely to think of this—the duty of acquainting others with the blessings they themselves have found. Is there such a thing as a secret Christian? Who knows of one? "I do!" you say. Well, the fact that you *know* him is a proof that he is not a secret Christian. Are such

deserters, or are they merely persons of retiring habits? That soldier was of retiring habits who ran away from the field on the day of battle. David, however, proclaimed God's works. Let us have a theology full of God and not of man. This is the grandest theme one can take up, and it was the Psalmist's theme. Let them keep to the atonement and all the blessed doctrines of grace. Bring out the old, well-tried guns now that such enemies as Ritualism and Popery confronted them. Note, further, that David's style was commendable. He spoke positively, and his object was to win sinners. What are we doing? All should do something; no man should keep his gift to himself; we must not play at being Christians. It is a poor, miserable thing to be half-and-half. Some can sit in a pew-corner, and when they have heard a good sermon they say, "Bless the Lord!" or they are passengers in the gospel coach who can do no more than find fault with the horses, coachman, guard, and all about them.

III. David's prayer. "Forsake me not." Is it not remarkable that so many of the people mentioned in the Bible as having fallen into sin are old people? Experienced coachmen tell us that the horses are more likely to fall at the bottom of a hill than anywhere else. Old age may be over-confident, or it may be harassed by many fears. They have need of sustaining grace to the last; and, on the other hand, God never forsakes His old servants.

IV. David's wish. He desired to bear one more testimony to his God. The aged and the weak show forth God's strength, and they are often the best "evidences" of the truth of religion.—*C. H. Spurgeon.* From *Twelve Realistic Sketches.*

COMPARATIVE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN'S OLD AGE.

(Verse 18.)

"Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not."

Though sin is often anticipated with pleasure, it is never remembered but

with self-reproach. Though duty is often looked forward to with trembling, it is never looked back upon as performed but with emotions of gladness. The memory of a life spent in wickedness is a garner of evil, ever pouring out its hoard of bitterness on the soul, and yet ever full; while that of a life devoted to the service of God is a treasure of bliss, as abundant as the wants of the soul, and as enduring as its immortality. If this be true—

I. The aged Christian must be happy in the contemplation of his past conduct and influence. While there is here and there a page of sorrow in his history, it is contemplated, *as a whole*, with gladness. It contains the record of long years of allegiance and service, rendered in the spirit of obedience and love to his ever loved and glorious Master; of many an earnest conflict with temptation, and of many a victory won, through grace, over its utmost power. It contains the record of many a purpose which had its origin in a love that embraced both God and man; of many a scheme of usefulness, &c. Happy the man who, from amid the feebleness of declining years, may look back over the pathway of such a history, and recognise it as his own!

II. He is happy in the contemplation of the blessings which have marked his history. The kindness of his Heavenly Father has not only strewn his path with rich gifts of grace and providence, but so constituted him, that every present blessing sends forward its light and joy to the end of his being. If a peculiar bliss is mine to-day, it is mine not to-day alone, but so long as the memory of to-day shall endure. The thoughts of the Christian in his old age are often sent back over the pathway of his life, and made to mark the points at which Heaven's gifts were most abundant and rich. . . . How striking, when contrasted with the experience of the aged sinner, appears the blessedness of the Christian, as, from amid the infirmities of his old age, he looks back upon the blessings included in his experience of the past!

III. He is happy in the contempla-

tion of his life's history, because of the lessons it has served to teach. Life is a school, and experience a teacher. The Christian whose presence in this school has been continued during a long course of years, cannot but be indebted to its teacher for rich stores of truth and wisdom.

IV. The aged disciple is happy in the continued possession of his life's chief good. Not so is it with the man whom the grey hairs and the tottering steps of age find still in his sins. He has outlived even the meagre enjoyments embraced in the experience of the worldling. . . . The aged disciple of Jesus has not thus survived his life's chief good. That which was years ago chosen as the chief portion of his soul is still the light and joy of his being. Though his hold on earthly pleasures was long ago relinquished, those connected with the smiles of a Saviour's countenance, and the experience of a Saviour's love, are his in the fullest measure. Who, then, would not desire the old age of the Christian?

V. The aged disciple is happy in the near prospect of realising his life's brightest hopes. In this respect also his experience is very different from that of the aged transgressor. He who has pursued the pathway of sin until he stands with the white locks, wrinkled features, and bowed form of an old man on the brink of the grave, has survived the death of all his hopes. . . . Turn your thoughts now to the aged follower of the Lamb. The present, instead of being the darkest and saddest period in his history, is the brightest and happiest. He is weary with his long journeying, but happy in the thought that the next tottering step may introduce him to a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Verily the old age of the Christian, marked by infirmity and weakness though it be, is a bright and happy period in his history. "When I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not."

Aged disciple of Jesus! you have reason for the profoundest gratitude that yours is the old age of the Christian!—*Jesse Guernsey. Abridged from The Preachers' Treasury.*

PSALM LXXII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm for Solomon." Margin: "Of Solomon." Hengstenberg: "Solomon is named in the title as the *author* of the Psalm. Attempts have been made, to no purpose, to interpret *לְשׁוֹמוֹן* here, as in Ps. cxxvii., in another sense. The *ל*, when it occurs as in the titles, without anything to limit its application, *always* indicates, as here, the author. In favour of the announcement in the title, we have first the remarkably *objective* character of the Psalm, common to it with the other writings of Solomon, and in striking contrast to that *flow of feeling* which forms such a marked feature in the Psalms of David. And, in the second place, there is also the fact that it is the circumstances of Solomon's time that form the groundwork of the Psalm."

We have in the Psalm a picture of the character and extent of the sovereignty of the Messiah. "Solomon, when at the height of his own power," says Canon Liddon, "sketches a Superhuman King, ruling an empire which in its character and in its compass altogether transcends his own. The extreme boundaries of the Kingdom of Israel melt away before the gaze of the Psalmist. The new kingdom reaches 'from sea to sea, and from the flood unto the world's end' (ver. 8). It reaches from each frontier of the Promised Land to the remotest regions of the known world in the opposite quarter. From the Mediterranean it extends to the ocean that washes the shores of Eastern Asia; from the Euphrates to the utmost West. At the feet of its mighty Monarch, all who are most inaccessible to the arms or the influence of Israel hasten to tender their voluntary submission. The wild sons of the desert (ver. 9), the merchants of Tarshish in the then distant Spain, the islanders of the Mediterranean, the Arab chiefs, the wealthy Nubians (ver. 10), are foremost in proffering their homage and fealty. But all kings are at last to fall down in submission before the Ruler of the new kingdom; all nations are to do Him service (ver. 11). His empire is to be co-extensive with the world: it is also to be co-enduring with time (ver. 17). His empire is to be spiritual; it is to confer peace on the world, but by righteousness (ver. 3). The King will Himself secure righteous judgment (vers. 2, 4), salvation (vers. 4, 13), deliverance (ver. 12), redemption (ver. 14), to His subjects. The needy, the afflicted, the friendless, will be the especial objects of His tender care (vers. 12, 13). His appearance in the world will be like the descent of 'the rain upon the mown grass' (ver. 6); the true life of man seems to have been killed out, but it is yet capable of being restored by Him. He himself, it is hinted, will be out of sight; but His Name will endure for ever; His Name will 'propagate'; and men shall be blessed in Him to the end of time (ver. 17). This King is immortal; He is also all-knowing and all-mighty. 'Omniscience alone can hear the cry of every human heart; Omnipotence alone can bring deliverance to every human sufferer.'"

Looking at the Psalm homiletically we see in it *A Prayer for Kings* (ver. 1), *The Glorious Reign of the Messiah* (vers. 2, 17), and the *Doxology*.

A PRAYER FOR KINGS.

(Verse 1.)

This brief prayer for the king suggests—

I. The character of a true king. It is clearly implied that he should be righteous. "Give Thy righteousness unto the king's son." Kings should be righteous in heart, in aims, in actions. They are bound to this,—

1. By obligations which are common to all men. Kings as much as their subjects are required "to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." The eternal and immutable laws of God for moral beings are as binding upon

the mightiest sovereign as upon the meanest subject.

2. By obligations which are special to men of high position. Their example is incomparably more influential than that of those who occupy less conspicuous, or obscure positions. "The people are fashioned," says Claudian, "according to the example of their king; and edicts are of less power than the model which his life exhibits."

"A sovereign's great example forms a people; The public breast is noble, or is vile, As he inspires it."—*Mallet*.

Hence kings are under special obligations to "wear the white flower of a blameless life."

"King-becoming graces

Are justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude."

—*Shakespeare*.

"He's a king,

A true right king, who dares do aught, save
wrong;

Fears nothing mortal, but to be unjust;
Who is not blown up with the flatt'ring puffs
Of spongy sycophants; who stands unmoved,
Despite the jostling of opinion;
Who can enjoy himself, maugre the throng
That strive to press the quiet out of him;
Who sits upon Jove's footstool as I do,
Adorning, not affecting, majesty;
Whose brow is wreathed with the silver crown
Of clear content."—*Marston*.

"He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

II. The function of a true king.

It is implied that his business is to administer justice. "Give the king Thy judgments, O God." The "judgments" are the legal decisions, or sentences. The judgments of God are contrasted with those which the king gives independently. "The essence of all justice lies in the conformity of the decisions of the earthly lord to the decisions of the heavenly Lord of Justice." Barnes: "It is one of the primary ideas of the character of a king that he is the fountain of justice; the maker of the laws; the dispenser of right to all his subjects. The officers of the law administer justice *under* him; the last appeal is to him." The true administrators of justice are "persuaded that justice is God's own work, and themselves His agents in this business,—the sentence, of right, God's own verdict, and themselves His priests to deliver it." (Comp. Deut. i. 17; 2 Chron. xix. 6; Prov. viii. 15.)

"A monarch should be
Heaven's true vicegerent, whose superior soul
Raised high above the tyrant's selfish poorness,
Pants but for power of doing good, rejects
All power of doing ill; who makes no war
But to revenge his people's wrongs; no peace
But what secures their safety; courts no fame
But from their happiness: a parent he,
The public parent—they not slaves, but sons."

—*Mallet*.

Or, as Tennyson portrays him—

"Who revered his conscience as his king;
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
Who spake no slander, no, nor listen'd to it;
Who loved one only, and who claved to her."

"The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever." The kingdom whose rulers are not characterised by righteousness, and whose judges are not just, must hasten to its overthrow.

III. The need of a true king. It is implied in the text that he needs—

1. *Divine guidance*. "Give the king Thy judgments, O God." If kings are to exercise the functions of their high office truly and wisely, they must be instructed and strengthened from above. When "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" rests upon kings, their rule shall be righteous, their throne secure, and their subjects happy. (Comp. Isa. xi. 2-5.)

2. *Divine grace*. "Give Thy righteousness unto the king's son." Righteousness is not innate in kings. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Righteousness must come to them as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and must be sought and obtained by faith, &c. Very great is the need of kings of the constant help of God. Their temptations are many and very powerful; they stand in slippery places; their exaltation has a tendency to unsettle their moral equilibrium, &c. They need the guidance and support of the Divine hand.

IV. The duty of subjects. We may make this our prayer for our rulers:—"Give the king Thy judgments, O God," &c. Every subject ought to pray for the blessing of God upon his sovereign. M. Henry: "Those who would live quiet and peaceable lives must pray for kings and all in authority, that God would give them His judgments and righteousness." Let us pray God with His favour to behold all the rulers of men, and so replenish them with the grace of His Holy Spirit, that they may always incline to His will and walk in His way.

THE GLORIOUS REIGN OF THE MESSIAH.

(Verses 2-17.)

That these splendid utterances cannot be applied merely to the kingdom of Solomon, or of any of his successors, must be obvious even to the most superficial reader. That they are prophetic of the kingdom of the Messiah will also be obvious, we think, to every one who thoughtfully regards them. Consider—

I. The blessings of His reign. Several of these are here specified.

1. *The administration of justice.* "He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. He shall judge the poor of the people. He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." (See remarks in the preceding sketch on *the function of a true king.*) Eloquent has Isaiah portrayed the character of the Messianic administration (xi. 1-5).

2. *The enjoyment of peace.* "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness." Mountains and hills are characteristic features of Palestine. In ancient times these were terraced and cultivated as far up as possible. In the representation of this peace by the Psalmist we have three ideas. (1) *Prevalence.* The mountains and hills by reason of their number and prominence are well fitted to express the idea that the land everywhere shall be full of peace. There shall be "abundance of peace." The war drum shall no longer throb, and the battle flag shall be for ever furled. Men "shall beat their swords into ploughshares," &c. Strife and bitterness between different classes of society shall be no more. Peace in man's own being. Peace between man and man. Peace between God and man. (2) *Reality.* "Peace by righteousness." The peace which is not rooted in righteousness is spurious and deceptive. True peace is the product and consequence of righteousness. It is so in the individual. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God," &c. It is so also in society and in nations.

Christ is "the Prince of Peace," because He "reigns in righteousness." (3) *Permanence.* The spurious peace which is not rooted in righteousness is of short duration. The true peace, which is "by righteousness," shall last. Like its Author, it is abiding, everlasting. What an unspeakably precious boon is this Divine peace!

3. *The progress of religion* (vers. 5-7). We have three conspicuous features of true religion. (1) *Reverence towards God.* "They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations." One of the blessed effects of the glorious reign of the Messiah is that God will be regarded by man with the deepest reverence. And this reverence shall be perpetual. Generations of men come and go—

"Like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever."

But the sun and moon remain and shine through all generations. While they remain, God shall be revered by man. And when they are no more, even for ever, shall He be feared. (2) *Refreshment from God.* "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." A beautiful illustration of Divine influences—

"As rain on meadows newly mown,
So shall He send His influence down;
His grace on fainting souls distils,
Like heavenly dew on thirsty hills."—Watts.

The showers that water the earth tend to produce *life, beauty, and fruit*. In this they symbolise the gracious influences of the reign of Jesus Christ. (3) *Growth towards God.* "In His days shall the righteous flourish." As the mown grass springs into vigorous and beauteous growth after genial showers, so the righteous in His day shall grow and prosper; they shall bring forth "fruit unto holiness." If they have been depressed, by His blessing they shall be revived and strengthened. Their faith and love and obedience, their

consecration and zeal and sanctity, their truth and tenderness and power, all shall increase. What an inspiring and glorious prospect this is! Evil shall not always lord it over good, &c.

4. *Beneficent government.* We have already made some remarks on the righteousness of His administration, but we return to it, because the Psalmist gives special prominence to His treatment of the poor and the oppressed. Three characteristics at least of that treatment he sets before us. (1) *He regards the cry of the needy and helpless.* "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." Not even the most obscure or despised of men shall cry to Him in vain. (2) *He champions their cause.* "He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence." He will befriend the friendless, will be the Helper of the helpless, and the Protector of the defenceless. "His administration will have special respect to those who are commonly overlooked, and who are exposed to oppression and wrong." (3) *He prizes their life.* "And precious shall their blood be in His sight." In His sight men are precious not in proportion to their rank or wealth or power, but according to their character. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and holds them dear to Him. He guards His subjects well because He loves them well. "Christ is the poor man's King."

5. *Abundant prosperity.* "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains, the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the field." The word—פֶּסֶף—translated "*handful*," is rendered *abundance* by Conant, Gesenius, Hengstenberg, Moll, *et al.* Fuerst gives as its meaning, *superabundance*. Abundance of corn is the sign of abundant prosperity. As the mountains are prominent and picturesque, so the signs of the prosperity would be conspicuous and beautiful. The cities also shall be populous and prosperous. Beauty, plenty, and

joy, shall be universally diffused throughout the dominions of the Messiah. An historical basis of the ideas of prosperity presented in this verse is found in the time of Solomon, and recorded in 1 Kings iv. 20. (For further treatment of verse 16, see below.) Such, in brief, are some of the more prominent blessings of the reign of the Christ. Consider—

II. The universality of His reign (vers. 8-11).

1. *He shall reign over all classes.* The wanderers of the desert and the kings of wealthy and famous cities shall bow to the sway of the Lord Jesus. Rich and poor, learned and illiterate, distinguished and obscure, great and small, men of all ranks and conditions, shall loyally call Jesus Lord.

2. *He shall reign in all places.* "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." For an historical basis of the statements in verses 8-10, see 1 Kings iv. 21. Applying the words of verse 8, to the kingdom of the Messiah we are not, it seems to us, to fix upon any particular sea or river. M. Henry: "No sea, no river, is named, that it might, by these proverbial expressions, intimate the universal monarchy of the Lord Jesus." Hengstenberg: "The dominion of this king extends from any one sea to any other sea, and from any river even to the ends of the earth—it is a kingdom of boundless extent." "All nations shall serve Him." (Comp. Rev. xi. 15.)

And His dominion shall be as *secure* as it is wide, as *real* as it is extensive. All His foes shall be completely subdued unto Him. "His enemies shall lick the dust," in token of reverence and submission to Him.

Mark the *reason* of this universal and complete sovereignty. The Psalmist gives it in verses 12-14. Perowne: "The reason is given why all kings and nations should thus do homage to Him who sits on David's throne. He has merited such submission by the exercise of every royal virtue, by the justice and the mercy of His sway, by His deep sympathy with, and compassion for, the poor, by the protection which He extends to them against the ministers of fraud

and violence. It is not that He merely covers with the shadow of His throne all neighbouring nations, and is acknowledged as their political head, but that the bright example which He sets, the majesty of righteousness enthroned in His person, compels all to bow before Him."

III. The perpetuity of His reign. "They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. . . . His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun." Margin: "Shall be as a son to continue his father's name for ever." Conant: "As long as the sun shall His name flourish." Moll: "Before the sun let His name sprout." The idea seems to be that the name of the king would be always acquiring fresh renown by His new deeds on behalf of His subjects. Through all the coming generations of men new glories shall break forth for His name, in which all nations may bless themselves. The reign of Jesus will be perpetual. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation." The perpetuity of His reign is guaranteed by—

1. *The declarations of God's Word* (Ps. xlv. 6, lxxxix. 36; Isa. ix. 7; Dan. iv. 3; Rev. xi. 15).

2. *The character of His sovereignty.* He rules in the hearts of His subjects, by the force of truth, righteousness, and love. The loyalty and service which they render to Him are voluntary and joyous.

IV. The praise of His reign. The Psalmist represents this as presented to the king in various forms. It is expressed by—

1. *Rendering homage to Him.* "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him."

2. *Rendering service to Him.* "All nations shall serve Him." His subjects will praise Him not only by forms and expressions of homage, but by loyal obedience also. Their hearty submission to Him will be manifest in their devoted service.

3. *Paying tribute to Him.* "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba." The day is surely coming when men everywhere shall gladly lay their best and most treasured possessions at His feet. Genius, eloquence, power, riches, shall all be heartily rendered to Him.

4. *Ascribing blessing to Him.* "Prayer also shall be made for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised. And men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed." The prayer is made "not for Him personally, but for the success of His reign—for the extension of His kingdom. Prayer made for *that* is made for *Him*, for He is identified with that." Instead of "men shall be blessed in Him," many render: "Shall bless themselves in Him;" and interpret it as the expression of admiration of His blessedness, and desire to be blessed as He is. Daily men praise Him. And the time approaches when men of every nation shall constantly ascribe to Him all power, and dominion, and glory, and blessing; their lives shall become grateful, adoring, and songful; from all peoples, and from all places, praise shall ascend to the Saviour-King.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the enemies of Christ submit themselves cheerfully to Him as their King.* Manifestly it is both their *duty* and their *interest* to do so. 2. *Let His loyal subjects take encouragement from the sure and glorious prospect of His reign.* The sin and strife and sorrow of the race will have an end. The kingdom of holiness, peace, and joy will be universal and perpetual. Here is encouragement to work and wait, to pray and hope.

"O'er every foe victorious,
He on His throne shall rest:
From age to age more glorious,
All blessing and all bless'd.

"The tide of time shall never
His covenant remove:
His name shall stand for ever;
That name to us is—LOVE."

—Montgomery.

PEACE BY POWER.

(Verse 3.)

"The mountains shall bring peace."

The writer of this Hebrew ode finds the peaceful in the grand—rest in greatness. Our doctrine is, *that the quiet of the human soul is to be honestly found, not in descending to its lower or less-forcible states, but in the freedom of its highest qualities, and through its stronger exercises: or, that Christian peace is an attainment of the spiritual energies, and not a mere acquiescence in inferiority.*

When the Saviour speaks of the ultimate result of His religion in the single heart or in the world, He calls it Peace; "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you." But as soon as you look into the spirit and relations of His words, you see that in this peace there is something quite peculiar. He says, "*My peace.*" It is a peace obtained by the drops of blood and the cross; Gethsemane and Calvary; by a life in which there was no place to lay the head. It is not a mere constitutional, negative, nor any superficial peace: it is not what we call pleasure, nor a happy temperament, nor gratified sensibilities, nor satiated appetites. It is something deeper and stronger. It is an attainment; it is a victory; it is tribulation overcome. It is the mightiest powers of our nature balanced, reconciled, and harmonised at last, though we know not by what struggles and sufferings, till, by the perfect sway of one supreme principle of faith, there are the equipoise and serenity that pass all understanding.

The three obvious attributes of mountains are elevation, magnitude, and permanency. Out of these three several characters comes an influence of peace. In just such attributes of strength, human character, also, is to find its moral balance, its real peace, viz., in its aspiration, its largeness, its constancy. Man is high with his devotional affections, his prayers; wide with his practical principles; and steadfast with his convictions. Or, he is high with his spirit, wide with his will, and steadfast with his reason. With these three properly

adjusted, you will have a general effect of serenity; because such a man will live in a certain equipoise within himself, centred and completed according to the grand designs of his Creator, as a creature belonging both to the world and heaven. He reaches up into the infinite mystery that broods like a sea of conscious life about him. He reaches out, in all liberal fellowships, to mankind, with a love that cannot narrow into hatred, nor be fretted into war; and he rests firmly on eternal foundations. And thus, on all sides—Godward, and man-ward, and self-ward—so far as man can, he resides in the securities of a well-defended peace.

Spiritual serenity, then, is spiritual strength. It comes in by no softness of sentiment, but by thorough work. It comes by a faith that emboldens and energises the whole soul, a penitence that searches and strains it, and often a secret fight of afflictions. Christianity is a robust religion. It was planted in the world by a race of heroes. . . .

Take any one of these three traits just mentioned away, and, besides what other ruin you make, you most disastrously disturb the peace. . . . On whichever side you enfeeble man, you unbalance and torture him.

Proceed to some examples, in other regions of life, how peace depends on power.

In literary expression, the effect of pathos is finest in thinkers habitually severe. What saves sentiment from sentimentality is the feeling of a firm intellectual fibre through the emotion.

Persons who have been in the strain and peril of some moral or civil revolution, wounded with real weapons, and compacted by times of terror, if they have benignant qualities, impress us in that way far more than is possible for men of softer discipline. Tenderness is doubly tender when we know a rugged and aggressive temper has been subdued to it by that rule over the spirit which is mightier than the taking of cities.

It is familiar how bereavements, which are the storms of the soul, prepare the way for religious tranquillity. Crosses bring calmness. . . . In the solemn portrait-galleries of history, the serenest faces are the saddest—where peace has not been inherited, but conquered.

We have this union of power and tenderness eminently in such as Luther;

Again, in the great pacifications of empires, the same rule prevails. It takes the strongest heads to bring peace. Diplomacy has to summon her stoutest, clearest-sighted, and farthest-sighted ministers. The most intrepid are most pacific. Magnanimity makes no quarrels.

Hence we come to discover in what order of persons we are to look for the noblest charity and the real consolation. We want our consolers to be, not only the subjects of pain, but its conquerors through their suffering. The more masculine your pity, the more it moves and melts.

And when we speak of comfort, we are directed up to the Comforter. . . . What is the *whole* doctrine of that Spirit, in the New Testament, and in Paul? They represent Him as not only Comforter, but also and first, Rebuker, Renewer, and Sanctifier.

All our peace is in God, who is not only the strongest, but Almighty. "The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."

Personal applications.

1. Learn never to be afraid of rugged and even painful experiences.

"Great souls snatch vigour from the stormy air,
While weaker natures suffer and despair,
Grief not the languor but the action brings,
And spreads the horizon but to nerve the wings."

2. A rule for "strengthening the brethren." As we would comfort one another, we must try, with the apostle's earnestness, to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

3. Of how sterling worth is a form of religious belief which holds fast the stringent as well as the soothing doctrine of Christ's evangelical teaching. The order of the universe is poised between justice and mercy; and it is not kindness, but the bitterest cruelty, which would unsettle that order, by giving us a Deity too doting to punish, and too fond too judge.

4. Learn the way of making our own eternal life secure. The New Testament speaks continually to us of salvation. By salvation Christ means such safety as lies in a sturdy and athletic power of character, will, heart, conscience, and intellect, got by daring to attempt great virtues and by incessant intrepidity. He holds up no lower standard than to be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect. He wins confidence by the very immensity of His demands.

5. We disturb the true spiritual order and invert God's plan for us, whenever we go in search of peace first, and not holiness. "First pure, then peaceable:" that is the clearly-pronounced order and everlasting law of a disciple's way.—*F. D. Huntington, D.D.* Abridged from *Christian Believing and Living*.

THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF GOD.

(Verse 16.)

Such figurative language as that of the text is frequently employed to describe the Gospel as a mere system of means, unlikely to accomplish the purpose contemplated, and yet as certain of ultimate success. Considering this language as referring to the Gospel, let us notice—

I. The insignificance of its com-

mencement. In Ezekiel's vision of the waters issuing from the sanctuary, it is but "a little rill," which takes its rise at the south side of the altar, just where the blood of the sacrifices overflow. In the vision of Nebuchadnezzar it is "a little stone," cut out of the mountain without hands. And in the New Testament we find our Saviour comparing

it to "a grain of mustard seed;" and to "a little leaven" hid in meal. In our text it is compared to "a handful of corn."

1. *Look at its commencement in the world.* It was heralded by one who had not his abode in cities, who was not of the honourable of the earth, either as to wealth or learning; but one of stern and forbidding aspect, &c. Look at its *Author*; a poor carpenter's son, belonging to the despised city of Nazareth; and to Him, He associates twelve of the poorest class of society. Yet to these twelve was committed the task of evangelising the world.

2. *Look at the fewness of its doctrines.* The first preachers of the Gospel went forth to proclaim a fact—that Jesus Christ had died for sinners—and from that fact they drew various inferences, and urged various duties upon men, and with these, as all that was necessary to accomplish their purpose, they went forth.

3. *Look at its commencement in the heart.* How insignificant are some of the means made use of. Perhaps it is a single word dropped from the lips of a preacher; sometimes it is the sight of a word in the Bible; sometimes even a look is enough; sometimes many are awakened by merely seeing others in concern, as in the great revival at Kilsyth, a century ago.

II. *Its unlikelihood of success.* "An handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains." How unlikely, how impossible, for it to yield a crop there. Yet such is the figure employed to represent the Gospel in the world. This language may point out—

1. *The feebleness of its instrumentality.* Soil found on the tops of mountains, both from its poverty and scarcity, would be a very unlikely instrument for yielding a crop of corn. So they who have been employed by God in diffusing the Gospel have not been such instruments as were likely in human estimation to accomplish its purposes. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty." He hath put the "treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power

may be of God." The first preachers of the cross were a few fishermen.

2. *The difficulties it has to surmount.* Corn sown on the top of a mountain would not be likely to yield a crop, on account of the adverse influences it would have to encounter. There would not only be the unfitness and scarcity of the soil itself; there would be the want of solar heat, its exposed situation, open to every current of air and to all the storms of the sky; and as mountains are the first to attract the clouds, the teeming rain would likely wash down both seed and soil to the base beneath. The Gospel, in its first promulgation among men, had to encounter many obstacles. (1) *It had to contend with long-established forms of error, . . . to encounter systems of superstition, which possessed a mighty influence over the minds of their votaries, because they had the argument of antiquity in their favour, and because they were the religious systems of their fathers.* (2) *It had to encounter those errors in an age of great refinement.* This was the Augustan age of literature. It was at this time that some of the greatest minds that ever adorned our planet were shedding the light of learning, philosophy, and poetry around them, much of which is resplendent to the present day. How unlikely was the Gospel to make progress in such an age as this. Yet this was the period chosen. (3) *The enmity of man's nature is another obstacle which would then as now be presented to the progress of the Gospel.* There is nothing in the doctrines or duties of the Gospel which is at all congenial to man's fallen nature. Its truths are foolishness to him. Its purity excites his enmity. (4) *There is against the Gospel the combined powerful agency of the mighty and malicious prince of darkness and his numerous followers.* This is a subject of frequent allusion to the early promoters of Christianity.

III. *Its glorious results.* "The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon," &c. These results are placed before us—

1. *In the fertility that attends it.* Wherever the waters of the Gospel flow, it turns the wilderness into a fruitful

field, and makes the desert as "the garden of the Lord." "Lovely tempers, fruits of grace," everywhere attend the proclamation of the Gospel of peace.

2. *In the beauty that adorns it.* "Shake like Lebanon." How beautiful the change which the Gospel has effected in every place in which it has been introduced. It has been alike successful in demolishing callous systems of philosophy and sanguinary superstition. What are those buildings which rear their fronts where once Druid temples were erected? They are asylums for the wretched, the sick, the destitute, and the dying. And to what do we owe the change? To the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Witness its triumphs

also in the islands of the South Sea, in Africa, &c.

3. *In the triumphs which it is destined universally to accomplish.* "They of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." Count the numbers of the blades of grass which are spread over the surface of this earth of ours: you cannot! Neither can you count the numbers of the future converts of Zion. This language may also point out its rapid progress in the latter day. Grass is proverbially speedy in its growth. The triumphs of the Gospel will very soon be equally rapid. "The earth shall be made to bring forth in one day, and a nation be born at once."—Abridged from *One Hundred Sketches of Sermons*.

HOPE OPENED TO THE WORLD.

(Verse 17.)

"Men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed."

Hope, with respect to the world, affords some comfort to us, when viewing its affecting condition since the fall; and this spring of consolation we have opened to us in God's word of promise. What a glorious time is the Psalmist looking forward to here! Observe—

I. The objects regarded. "Men." Not angels. While we have abundant cause to admire the grace of God in this; it must obviously be looked upon as bearing a striking impress of sovereignty. Men participated with devils in their guilt; yet not one of the latter is ever to be blessed (Heb. ii. 16; 2 Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6).

II. The number included. "All nations." How many nations are there in the world that never heard of Christ? How many, that have been deprived of the Gospel during a long series of ages? But this distinction among nations with respect to the means of salvation was

never intended in the Divine mind to continue always (Matt. xxiv. 14; xxvi. 13; Mark xiv. 9; xvi. 15). If little has been hitherto done for distant countries, it must be ascribed to the selfishness of men (Phil. ii. 21).

III. The exercise mentioned. "Call Him blessed." The worth of Christ shall be universally sung; none shall be afraid to confess Him before men, or dare to offer any vain excuse for not yielding allegiance to Him; but from every tribe under heaven soldiers shall hasten to His standard and proclaim His honours.

IV. The certainty expressed. "All nations shall call Him blessed." This certainty may be argued from prophetic representation—from the dominion given to the Saviour—from the facilities afforded in the present day to missionary exertions—from the desires and expectations of the saints—and from the Divine threatenings against the powers of darkness.—*W. Sleight*.

DOXOLOGY.

(Verses 18-20.)

"Verses 18 and 19 do not belong to the Psalm, but contain the doxology which forms the conclusion of the

second book." This doxology is fuller than that which is appended to Ps. xli., at the close of the first book.

The historical remark which constitutes verse 20 is no part either of the Psalm or of the doxology. It seems to have been attached to a collection of the Psalms of David, as distinguished from separate Psalms of his. Hengstenberg: "All the Psalms of David in the last two books are inserted as component parts into the later cycles. The subscription at the end of the second book must have been designed to separate the free and the bound, the scattered and the serial Psalms of David, from each other. Analogous in some measure is the subscription—'At an end are the speeches of Job,' in Job xxxi. 40, which is not contradicted by the fact that Job appears again speaking, in chaps. xl. and xlii.; it should rather be regarded as serving to give us a right understanding of that formal conclusion." In this doxology there are four leading homiletic points—

I. The comprehensiveness of the praise. God is praised because—

1. *Of what He is in Himself.* "Blessed be the Lord God, and blessed be His glorious name." Note the ideas conveyed by these terms. "*Jehovah*"—"the existing, i.e., He who has come into existence by nothing outside Himself, the continuing, permanent, everlasting; its antithesis or opposite being the non-real, the transitory, the nought."—*Fuerst*. "God," *Elohim*, the Almighty. "*His glorious name*," perhaps referring particularly to *Jehovah*. "Still the prayer would be, that all the names by which He is known, all by which He has revealed Himself, might be regarded with veneration always and everywhere."

2. *Of what He is to His people.* "The God of Israel." He had entered into covenant relation with them. (See p. 205.)

3. *Of what He does.* "Who only doeth wondrous things." (α) In creation. (β) In providence. (γ) In redemption. His wondrous redemptive work transcends even angelic intelligence. "Which things the angels desire to look into."

"The first-born sons of light
Desire in vain its depths to see;
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length and breadth and height."

His works are wondrous (1) In their power. (2) In their wisdom. (3) In their kindness. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (4) In their significance. "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Therefore, "Blessed be the Lord God," &c.

II. The perpetuity of the praise. "For ever."

"My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures."

He is "the author of eternal salvation;" He calls us "to His eternal glory;" He promises an "eternal inheritance;" therefore, let His praise be eternal.

"But O! eternity's too short
To utter all His praise."

III. The universality of the praise.

"Let the whole earth be filled with His glory." (Comp. Num. xiv. 21.) This brief prayer involves two things—

1. *That the whole earth may be filled with His blessing.* "It is not a little favoured spot that the Psalmist regards; it is not an insulated portion of the globe that he would have fructified and converted into a paradise. It is not on his own garden or fields that he wishes the refreshing showers only to fall; but with a noble, expansive, and generous mind, he prays that the whole earth may be filled with God's glory."

2. *That the whole earth may be filled with His praise.* "Let every heart, and every mouth, and every assembly be filled with the high praises of God." (See Mal. i. 11.)

IV. The intensity of the praise. "Amen and Amen." (See p. 205.)

"May kindness, truth,
Wisdom, and knowledge, liberty, and power,
Virtue, and holiness o'erspread all orbs;
The world be bliss and love;
And heaven above be all things; till at last
The music from all souls redeemed shall rise,
Like a perpetual fountain of pure sound,
Upspringing, sparkling in the silvery blue;
From round creation to Thy feet, O God!"

—P. J. Bailey.

PSALM LXXIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm of Asaph," or, as in the margin, "for Asaph." See introduction to Ps. 1.

Subject.—The mental difficulties arising from the contemplation of the temporal prosperity of the wicked and the adversity of the righteous under the government of God. "The Psalm is very nearly related to the xxxvii. and xlix., as far as its contents are concerned. Amyraldus took quite a correct view as to what *distinguishes* it from these Psalms, and forms its individual physiognomy. 'In Psalm xxxvii. the prophet merely shows how believers ought to conduct themselves when they perceive the prosperity of the ungodly: he himself did not stumble at it. But here Asaph, though a great and pious man, acknowledges that the providence of God in this respect did sometimes appear to him mysterious, and that he felt great difficulty in justifying it. Yea, from the beginning of this Psalm we see how he merged out of the deep thoughts into which his spirit, agitated and vexed by doubts, had sunk, until, in the end, better views obtained the ascendancy. . . . He has adopted this method in order that believers might contemplate, as in a picture, the conflict to which at times they are exposed, and might see what weapons they have to seize against the assaults of the flesh.'"—Hengstenberg.

THE GOOD MAN'S CONFIDENCE OF GOD'S GOODNESS TO HIS PEOPLE.

(Verse 1.)

I. He indicates the character of God's people.

"Israel, . . . such as are of a clean heart." The Psalmist held that "they were not all Israel which were of Israel; neither because they were the seed of Abraham were they all children." He speaks not of those who were Israelites merely according to the flesh, but of those who in spirit and principle and conduct were "Israelites indeed." The true Israelite was clean not only ceremonially, but also spiritually. So now the people of God are not those who merely claim to be "the elect" of God, or those who merely "profess and call themselves Christians," or those who merely say unto Jesus Christ, "Lord, Lord;" but those who "do the will of the Father which is in heaven." God requires of His people "truth in the inward parts."

1. *Man's heart by nature is impure.*

2. *God has provided means for the purification of man's heart.* (Isaiah i. 18; Zech. xiii. 1; 1 John i. 7-9.)

3. *God requires man to avail himself of these means.* (Isaiah i. 16; 1 Thess. iv. 7; Heb. xii. 14.)

4. *The true people of God are complying with this requirement.*

II. He asserts God's special goodness to His people.

"God is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works;" but He is *especially* good to His own people. This may be seen in that,—1. *He overrules all circumstances and events for their well-being.* "Mercies and afflictions shall turn to their good; the most poisonous drugs shall be medicinal; the most cross providence shall carry on the design of their salvation." "All things work together for good to them that love God." 2. *He guides and sustains them in this life* (vers. 23, 24). "In the cloudy and dark day" He leads them wisely and safely, and when life's "burden seems greater than their strength can bear," He makes His grace to abound unto them. 3. *He Himself is their everlasting portion and joy* (vers. 25, 26). His presence breathes peace within them even amidst outward agitation and conflict, fills their heart with supernal music even amidst the most hoarse and tumultuous voices of the world, and so enriches their being that they feel that they have all things in Him. 4. *He will receive them into ever-increasing glory* (ver. 24). The fulness of life and treasure, of joy and blessedness, which is reserved in heaven for them, is unspeakably great. "Truly God is good to Israel." This Asaph had once doubted, sadly and painfully doubted. Now he doubts it

no longer, but asserts it with the clear accent of deep conviction. He is confident that God is thus good to Israel,—

1. *Notwithstanding all appearances tending to an opposite conclusion* (vers. 3–14.) 2. *Notwithstanding his own dark doubts* (vers. 3, 11, 13). 3. *As may be proved satisfactorily to men of sincere*

heart by many considerations, e.g., (α) Our ignorance (ver. 22). We see only a small part of His ways. (β) The brevity of the prosperity of the wicked (vers. 18, 19). (γ) The vast superiority of the portion of the good man (vers. 23–26). It is superior in its nature, duration, &c.

THE TEMPORAL PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED.

(Verses 2–14.)

I. The temporal prosperity of the wicked is sometimes clearly manifest.

1. *In their exemption from trouble.* “They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men.” It is not unfrequently the case that men who are living selfish and sinful lives appear to enjoy complete immunity from the sufferings and trials to which the great majority of men are subjected. It almost seems as though there had been some special interposition of Providence in their favour, warding away from them “the ills that flesh is heir to.” They are the most ill-deserving, yet they have the best portion. To unaided human reason this is an inexplicable anomaly; but to the meek believer “there ariseth light in the darkness.” There are stones which are so common that no lapidary will attempt to cut or polish them into brilliance and beauty. There are others which they manipulate with fond care and patient enthusiasm. “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,” &c.

2. *In the gratification of their desires.* “Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish.” Their luxury and self-indulgence are so great that they are manifest in their countenance, and especially in their eyes. The face, that index of the soul, proclaims to all observers the nature of their portion and its plenteousness. They “fare sumptuously every day.” The crumbs which fall from their table would be a feast in the eyes of many a poor saint. “Their wishes are gratified, and more; their very greediness is exceeded; they call for water, and the world gives them milk; they ask for

hundreds, and thousands are lavished at their feet.”

3. *In the increase of their possessions.* They “prosper in the world; they increase in riches.” They are like the rich man whose grounds brought forth so plentifully that he had not where to bestow his fruits and goods. Their harvests are not injured by blight or mildew or storm; their vessels are not wrecked at sea; their business is not ruined by losses or the failures of other men. Swiftly and surely “they increase in riches.” Such was the temporal prosperity of the wicked which met the eye, and arrested the attention, and troubled the soul of the Psalmist. It was unmistakably great and manifest.

II. The temporal prosperity of the wicked is sometimes continued even to the very end of life.

It might have been thought that as they drew near to the end of life their peace and pleasure would have been exchanged for anxiety and pain; and that their death would be marked by remorse and dread. But “there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm.” Their prosperity apparently endures to the very last moment of their life in this world. They have lived in pleasure, and they die in peace. Their spiritual sensibilities are so blunted that death and eternity make no impression upon them. Or their hearts have become “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Or they delude themselves with false hopes, and “believe a lie.”

III. The temporal prosperity of the wicked has an injurious effect upon their character.

1. *It generates pride.* "Pride compasseth them about as a chain; . . . they speak loftily." Their temporal prosperity awoke in them no feeling of gratitude, no humble sense of want of desert; but a concealed notion and feeling that they were incomparably superior to other men. When prosperity humbles us with the feeling of our unworthiness it is truly a blessing; when it leads us to ask, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me?" it is enriching our souls. But when by reason of it we are inflated with presumption and pride it becomes to us a great curse. How vain and mistaken is pride of wealth even in the man of greatest possessions!

2. *It generates tyranny and violence.* "Violence covereth them as a garment; . . . they speak wickedly concerning oppression." Their own prosperity, which should have made them generous and kind to the unfortunate, made them violent and tyrannical. Violence was their habit; they wore it as a garment. They oppressed the poor, and, so far from feeling ashamed of themselves for so doing, or having any misgivings as to their conduct, they boasted of it, they gloried in it. They were tyrannical, and paraded their tyranny. They were cruel, and exulted in their cruelty. Such conduct reveals the meanness and cowardice of their nature, and stamps them as belonging to the basest and blackest of the race of evil-doers.

3. *It generates blasphemy.* "They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth." So far are they from acknowledging God as the Author of their prosperity that they speak against Him. They are so puffed up that they imagine themselves independent of God and masters of the world; and they blaspheme His name. Surely such sinners—proud, oppressive, violent, blasphemous sinners—are ripening for destruction. Sure as there is justice in the universe, sooner or later it must smite them, unless they turn from their evil way. They are "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." The temporal prosperity of these men is not to blame for their wickedness. In the nature of prosperity itself there is

nothing fitted to deprave human character. On the other hand, it has often been the means of great spiritual blessing. Nor in granting such prosperity does God design the corruption or hardening of human hearts. All His designs aim at human blessedness. It is the depraved heart of man that perverts the blessing of temporal prosperity and educes so much evil from it. Sinful man can pervert the bread of life into rankest poison, and even "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness."

IV. *The temporal prosperity of the wicked is a great trial to the people of God.*

1. *It generates painful doubts concerning Him.* As they reflect upon the prosperity of these wicked men they say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" Can it be that God sees all this prosperity and all this wickedness, and yet allows it? If He knew these apparently great anomalies which perplex and distress His people, would He not prevent them? It is difficult at times for a thoughtful mind to believe in the omniscience of an Almighty and righteous and good God. And the contemplation of good men suffering, and outrageously wicked men triumphing, frequently occasions such doubt.

2. *It generates doubts as to the value of religion.* Asaph felt that he had "cleansed his heart" in vain, and "washed his hands in innocency" in vain. It seemed to him that it was of no use that he had striven after purity in his inner and outer life.

3. *Occasions great sorrow to them.* "His people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." They returned again and again to the contemplation of this subject, and as often as they returned they would drink deep draughts of sorrow. The mysteries of Providence are sometimes painful to believers; and when faith is sorely tried in any matter that pertains to God, great is the grief of His people. Asaph was frequently and greatly afflicted. "All the day long he was plagued, and chastened every morning;" while the proud rebels were exulting in their prosperity.

4. *Imperils their spiritual safety.* The Psalmist felt that his "feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped." His faith almost failed him in his great trial; unbelief was almost victorious.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let those who are prospering temporally learn to grasp their blessings with a grateful hand, and to dispense them with a generous hand, lest*

they become a curse to them. 2. *Let the proud sinner humble himself penitently before God and sue for mercy ere it is too late.* 3. *Let the perplexed saint learn with patience to wait till God explains the mysteries of His government.* "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

CRISES IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

(Verse 2.)

Considering these crises as illustrated by this of Asaph's, we remark—

I. That they are sometimes occasioned by the providence of God. It was so in the case before us. Nearly every thoughtful person has felt the difficulty which perplexed the Psalmist. So also when useful and valued lives are cut off in the midst of their days, while hoary-headed sinners are left lumbering the ground, or afflicted saints who long for release are left to linger here in pain;—or when generous and diligently prosecuted plans of usefulness end in apparent failure, while selfish and evil projects succeed, our faith in the government of God is sorely shaken. Ah! there are times when the working out of the arrangements of Providence leads us to cry out, "How doth God know?" &c. At such times nothing seems real, everything eludes our grasp, we can obtain no sure footing, &c.

These crises of the inner life are sometimes occasioned by temptations in business, or in society, or in solitude; the temptation is real, has great influence over us, we are on the point of yielding, our "feet are almost gone," &c.

II. That they are painful to the soul. Asaph tried to overcome his doubts and fears, but his speculations were all baffled, his reason was over-matched, and his heart was pained. His greatest suffering was in this, that he was "perplexed in reference to his God." To a true man doubt as to God's character and government is ever a distressing thing. Only fools glory in doubting, criticising, and denying the great truths which are the stay of human hearts. He who parades his doubts has never expe-

rienced true faith, and his doubts are unreal or he could not parade them. Such sham doubts never cause any spiritual crises. The doubts of a living soul are faith in conflict with difficulties, faith fighting against such aspects and interpretations of life, and against such arguments that threaten her life. Such struggles of faith are always painful. To the sincere soul to doubt God's wisdom, righteousness, and love, is unspeakable anguish.

III. That they are surmounted in communion with God. In drawing near to God the Psalmist received such revelations as strengthened his faith and hope, and such inspirations as gave calmness and joy to his heart (verse 17). In fellowship with God mental difficulties vanish, temptations lose their power, spiritual perils cease. "The meek will He guide in judgment," &c. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," &c. "Such as are of a clean heart" will surely pass victoriously from the darkness and pain of doubt into the light and joy of assured confidence.

"Perplex in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beats his music out."

Take your doubts to God, tell Him of your temptations, hide yourself in Him in the time of danger, and you will come out of every trial and crisis of your inner life more than conqueror.

Our subject urges the importance of—

1. *Watchfulness, lest we fall.*

2. *Maintaining purity of heart and righteousness of life.* Integrity, truthfulness, love, are ever right and beautiful. In the densest mental darkness cleave to

these things. "If any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine," &c.

3. *Seeking fellowship with the best and highest, especially with God Himself.* If trouble, and doubt, and pain send us

"into the sanctuary of God" to seek help, they will prove blessings in disguise. If the great trials of our spiritual life are the means of bringing us nearer to the heart of God, they will turn out to be our greatest blessings

THE VALUE OF DYING EXPERIENCES.

(Verse 4.)

The calm deaths of the wicked perplexed the Psalmist. They not only lived in pleasure; they also died with ease. Let us consider *The Value of Dying Experiences*—

I. The calm death of the wicked is no proof of Divine support. Such calmness may arise from—

1. *Unconcern.* Their spiritual susceptibilities may be so blunted, and their spiritual faculties so enervated, that they have no lively apprehensions of the spiritual and eternal state though they are so near to it. "Conscience may be cold and dead, so that when the man comes to die he is utterly callous to the unseen things of God's other world, and his friends say that he died like a lamb." "Like brutes they live, like brutes they die." Such a death may be quiet, but it is unspeakably terrible. Such unconcern is more deplorable than wild alarm. Think of the man when the unconcern is broken!

2. *Hardihood.* "Careless persons become case-hardened, and continue presumptuously secure even to the last." There have been persons so hardened in profanity and crime that they have determined, to quote their own words, "to die game." Lord Byron asked, "Shall I sue for mercy?" After a long pause he added, "Come, come, no weakness, let's be a man to the last."

3. *False and presumptuous hopes in Divine mercy.* We have known persons who have neglected God and His service all their life, and who, when remonstrated with have said, "God is merciful; if when we come to die we ask Him to save us, He will do so." And in such a state they have died. But theirs was not Christian faith or hope, but sinful presumption. And they encouraged the

presumption until they accepted the delusion as reality, and believed the lie to be true (Prov. xi. 7).

II. Shrinking and fear on the part of the righteous as they approach death are no proof that the divine support is withdrawn.

In the last hours, pain and a sense of the solemnity of the great change may be a sore trial to the child of God. Our Lord Himself as He drew near to death cried out in mysterious and awful anguish of spirit. We need not then be surprised if His humble followers cry out as they draw near to the awful bourn.—This point is admirably illustrated in Christian and Hopeful passing through the river of death, in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

III. The most precious religious testimonies of the dying are poor compared with the testimony of a useful and godly life.

I would not in the least undervalue the testimonies of dying men to the truth of Christianity, or to the faithfulness of God, or to the preciousness of Christ. To loving friends and relatives such testimonies are unspeakably precious. Some of these testimonies are held as a sacred possession by the Christian Church at large. (See an excellent collection of them in *The Dict. of Illus. Prose*, Dickinson.) But we hold that they are not to be compared with the testimony of the life. What are a few dying words, however beautiful and precious, to years of holy living and useful working? Moreover, the mental state of the dying is often affected by the nature of the disease, or by the medicines administered.

1. *Learn to estimate truly the worth of death-bed scenes and testimonies.* A

quiet death is no more a proof of God's favour than a life of temporal prosperity.

2. *Learn to live devoutly and righteously, because so to live is the will of God.*

A GREAT NECESSITY OF ALL MEN AND A GREAT MISTAKE OF SOME MEN.

(Verse 13.)

I. A great necessity of all men. Purity of heart and life. "My heart," my inner life: "my hands," my outer life. Heart and hands represent spirit and conduct. Asaph had sincerely striven after purity in both. His words imply—

1. *Consciousness of impurity in heart and life.*

2. *Knowledge of a cleansing element or influence* (Isa. i. 18; Zech. xiii. 1; Heb. ix. 13, 14; 1 John i. 7, 9).

3. *Personal application of this element or influence.* (Isa. i. 16; Rev. vii. 14.)

II. A great mistake of some men. "In vain." In this Asaph was mistaken; for, 1. *In itself purity is better than impurity.* 2. *The desire and effort to attain purity enrich and strengthen the soul.* 3. *The reward of purity is spiritual, not material, and is largely realised in the present.* 4. *The reward of purity is to a great extent in the future.*

THE TRANSITION OF A TROUBLED SOUL FROM CONFLICT TO VICTORY.

(Verses 15-17.)

The passage of the Poet from doubt to confidence as here set before us was marked by—

I. Thoughtful consideration of others.

Asaph felt that, if he published his inward doubts, and made known the dark suggestions which occurred to him, and the painful experiences through which he passed, he would be acting wrongly towards God's people. All his trouble he kept to himself, lest by making it known he should injure the children of God. Doubtless there are times when we may and even ought to speak of our mental perplexities. We may speak of them *with a view of obtaining help to overcome them.* To those who, by reason of large spiritual experience, or patient and devout study, or eminent piety, are able to assist us in solving the enigmas which perplex us, we may advantageously speak of our difficulties and doubts. We may speak of them *with the view of affording help to others who may be engaged in the conflict.* If we have overcome our difficulties and have entered into rest, the story of our battle and victory may nerve the heart of some brother who is fighting a similar battle. If we know such an

one let us tell him of the trial of our faith, and how we overcame, and "what God hath done for our soul." But we may not speak of them to those who are strangers to such questionings. Untold mischief may be the result if we do. We have no right to infect others with the doubts which distress us. And without this kindly consideration of others, which the Psalmist exercised, we shall not be likely to attain the victory over our own doubts. Let us be ever ready to speak wise and helpful words, which may tend to increase men's faith and hope; but let us bear our own pain in silence rather than obtain relief by communicating our doubts to those who are strangers to such experiences, and thereby injuring them perhaps irretrievably.

"O thou that after toil and storm
Mayst seem to have reach'd a purer air,
Whose faith has centre everywhere,
Nor cares to fix itself to form;

"Leave thou thy sister when she prays,
Her early Heaven, her happy views;
Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse
A life that leads melodious days."

—Tennyson.

II. Personal effort for himself.

According to verse 16, the Psalmist

made earnest efforts to overcome his mental difficulties, but without success. He looked at the subject in many aspects, he approached it from various directions, he considered carefully the respective portions of it, he reasoned with himself concerning it; but he could not overcome his doubts. His perplexities remained in full force. The enigma still confronted him, sphinx-like and distressing. Human reason is unable to fully understand the workings of Divine Providence. Its mysteries and seeming anomalies arouse many inquiries to which we are utterly unable to give any satisfactory response. We think to know this, but it is too painful for us. Nor is this surprising, when we consider—

1. *Our proneness to error.* We are liable to err in judgment. Our moral imperfections prevent us from obtaining clear views of spiritual truth. At times bodily suffering and mental distress lead us to meditate almost exclusively upon the pain and travail of life; we close our eyes to its brightness and beauty and joy. In all ages mankind has exhibited an extraordinary willingness to “follow cunningly-devised fables;” and even sincere truth-seekers have often wandered into strange districts of error and untruth.

2. *The vast disparity between the student and the subject of investigation.* We strive to comprehend “eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to man;” and “we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon the earth are as a shadow.” The great plan of God’s government is so vast and complicated, it has already been in operation so long, it is destined to continue to operate so long, and the span of its operations is so wide that we can only see a very small portion of its working. In our endeavour to interpret His way and work we are speedily baffled and bewildered, while He calmly carries forward the development of His great plans and purposes, leaving us to work and wait with patience the unfolding of their significance. We see “parts of His ways;” but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His

power who can understand?” “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding.” “O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

3. *The Divine reserve.* Many things are intentionally hidden from us by God. “Secret things belong unto the Lord our God.” “Clouds and darkness are round about Him.” “His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known.” *Mystery is educational.* It excites to inquiry and investigation. It promotes humility and reverence. *Mystery is merciful.* If the secret things were revealed to us the knowledge may be overwhelming. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”

III. Approach unto God.

“The Psalmist goes here with *the feet of his heart* into the sanctuary, draws near to God, and gets from this clear fountain the insight which natural reason could not give him.” He sought fellowship with God, and in that fellowship he obtained the help which he needed. He entered the holy place of Divine communion, and there received such intelligence and inspiration as brought confidence and peace to his soul.

1. *Light was imparted to him.* The sinner’s portion and the saint’s heritage appeared to him in new and different aspects. He saw the perils which surround the wicked, and the fearful end which awaits them. He saw also the strong “right hand” that upholds, the infallible “counsel” that guides, and the exceeding “glory” that awaits the good; and he felt the vast superiority of the saint’s portion. God’s revelation in providence should be studied in the light which proceeds from His revelation in His Word.

2. *His faith was increased.* In communion with God Asaph saw clearly his own insufficiency and God’s all-sufficiency, and his faith grew strong. As he contemplated the revelations of the

future which he received in the sanctuary of God his confidence waxed strong and triumphant. Communion with God imparts assurance and peace to the soul. In His presence doubt expires.

3. *His heart was strengthened.* He felt no longer pained and powerless, but strong and joyful. His troubled and almost-despairing wail has given place to a hymn of rest and gladness; for "God is the Rock of his heart, and his portion for ever."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let those who boast themselves in the strength of their reason*

learn how insufficient it is to comprehend the ways of God.

2. *Let the perplexed and troubled child of God learn to seek help in communion with his Father—God.*

3. *Let us all cultivate a large and loyal trust in the providence of God. He doeth all things well.*

"I'm apt to think, the man That could surround the sum of things, and spy The heart of God and secrets of His empire, Would speak but love; with him the bright result

Would change the hue of intermediate scenes, And make one thing of all theology."

—Gambold.

THE PRESENT POSITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE WICKED AS SEEN BY THE SPIRITUALLY ENLIGHTENED MAN.

(Verses 18–20.)

I. Their present position is perilous.

"Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places." The prosperity of the wicked is not a stable, abiding thing. Riches frequently "make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." All temporal prosperity and wealth must be laid down at death. When the rich man "dieth he shall carry nothing away." In the grave all are equal. The poor wretch who died homeless and penniless is no poorer there than "kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves, or princes that had gold and filled their houses with silver." And even while their wealth and pleasure continue, wicked men stand in slippery places; no solid rock supports them; they have no firm footing; their very wealth may prove the occasion of their overthrow; their self-indulgence and luxury may lead to their utter and painful ruin. Surely their position is not an enviable one. Better far is it to travel our life-journey upon a rugged and thorny road so that it be safe and lead to a blessed destiny, than to walk as on velvet lawns amid the odours of sweetest flowers, in constant peril, and with certain and fearful destruction awaiting us in the end.

II. Their future prospects are terrible.

Destruction lies before them as their

portion in the next world. In this life prosperity, in the next perdition. In this life purple and fine linen and sumptuous fare; in the next the robe of flame, and not even a drop of water to allay their burning thirst.

1. *Their destruction will be complete.* "Thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." Notwithstanding their wealth, and pomp, and power, justice smites them sternly and ruinously. They are "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power."

2. *Their destruction will be sudden.* "In a moment." "When they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." In the midst of their prosperity, when their cup of pleasure is fullest, and their power greatest, and their sense of security most confirmed, they are smitten down into destruction and cast into hell.

"They fall as falls the oak—

At once, and blasted by the thunder stroke."

3. *Their destruction is effected by God.* "Thou castedst them down into destruction." Not by chance does their ruin

come upon them, but "as a destruction from the Almighty." God comes forth in judgment against them to punish them for their corruption and pride, their oppression and violence, their presumption and blasphemy. There is justice in the universe; under God's government evil-doers are punished. Though the execution of the sentence may be long delayed, it will take place in due time. Sinners must either be saved by God in His mercy, or be destroyed by Him in His justice.

4. *Their destruction will make manifest the unreality of their former prosperity.* Ungodly men who have their portion in this life are asleep and dreaming as regards the realities of the great spiritual world. To them truth, righteousness, love, their own souls, and the great God, are very unreal and shadowy. Their temporal possessions, pleasures, and powers, they regard as realities grand and precious. But their dreams will

come to an end. A great awakening is at hand for them. When awakened by God their estimate of things will be completely reversed. What were once their realities will have passed away from them as shadows; while the grand verities which once they set aside as myths and fables will be clear to them in all their reality and importance. They will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt." "As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, in the awakening, Thou shalt despise their image." Who can fathom the abyss of sin and degradation which he has sounded whom God despises? To be despised by God—how unutterably dreadful!

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the wicked take warning and turn from their evil way.* The "Lord is good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon" Him. 2. *Let the child of God never more envy the wicked their temporal prosperity.*

THE LIFE OF UNGODLY MEN A DREAM.

(Verse 20.)

Human life on the earth has been compared to a *Pilgrimage* (Gen. xlvii. 9).—To a *Race* (1 Cor. ix. 24).—To a *Battle* (1 Tim. vi. 12).—To a *Stewardship* (Matt. xxv. 14-30)—and to a *Dream*, as in our text.

There is much in the present life of every good man that is very dreamlike.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made of,
And our little life is rounded by a sleep."

In relation to spiritual and eternal verities the impressions of earnest godly men are but dim and dreamy as compared with the verities themselves. But our text represents *the life of ungodly men as a dream*. Let us notice some points of analogy between the two—

I. Unreality. In dreams the mind is in a world of illusions, a world of fiction. Such is the life of the wicked, who have their portion in this world. *See this in their ideas of pleasure, wealth, and usefulness.* How false! See it especially in the things upon which their

heart was set, as mentioned by Asaph, viz., temporal prosperity and worldly possessions.

1. *They are evanescent.* Wealth, rank, power, are often lost. They must all be laid down at death.

2. *By their very nature they are not permanent things.* Worldly power is essentially a shifting thing; worldly rank an adventitious thing; material wealth an unstable transitory thing.

3. *The only permanent realities to spiritual beings must be spiritual.* Truth, righteousness, love, the human soul, God, are real and abiding. But men call the shadows realities, &c.

II. Brevity. Dreams are very short. In our dreams we seem to live for hours, days, weeks, even in a few minutes. And, at the longest, how brief is this life of ours here!

1. *When viewed with respect to the work to be done by us in it.* Think of the work to be done by us in ourselves and for ourselves, and of the work we have to do for others. Unspeakably

momentous issues depend upon our life in this world.

2. *When contrasted with eternity.* This present life is a mere "twinkling of an eye" when placed by the side of eternity. Yet men live as though it would last for ever. Surely they are dreaming; their life is a dream.

III. Termination. Dreaming is not a permanent state. Every dream has its ending. So is it with the dream of an ungodly life. There are two awakenings, one or other of which must arouse every sinful dreamer to realities.

1. *Some awake in response to the call of Divine love.* God says to them, "Awake thou that sleepest," &c. They hear and obey, and are as it were in a new world. "Old things have passed away; all things have become new." To them now "life is real, life is earnest." They are converted.

They have awoke to reality and blessedness.

2. *Some awake only when aroused by the thunder peals of judgment.* There is no refusing to listen to that call. They awake to—

(a.) *Disappointment.* Their realities have vanished; their hope expires; their trust becomes their confusion.

(β.) *Destitution.* The things in which they rested all fail them now. Their fancied wealth is all gone. Now they know themselves to be "wretched, and miserable, and poor," &c.

(γ.) *Shame and Distress.* "Thou shalt despise their image." Think of "their end. . . . Thou castedst them down into," &c.

Are you awake? Or are you asleep and dreaming? God calls to you, "Awake thou that sleepest," &c. "Awake to righteousness," &c. Listen and obey. **AWAKE NOW.**

THE ATTITUDE OF A VICTORIOUS SOUL.

(Verses 21-28.)

Having considered the severe spiritual conflict of the Psalmist, and the transition from conflict to victory, and his estimate of the portion of the wicked after he had been spiritually enlightened, we now proceed to notice the attitude of his soul in victory. This was marked by two main features.

I. Deep self-abasement.

Having completely mastered his difficulties and come out of the battle more than conqueror, we listen to his voice, and hear no tone of self-applause, no sound of boasting, but rather a humble confession of his folly and ignorance. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast for thee." He felt deeply his own ignorance and folly, especially in this that he had considered human life in relation to the Providence of God as a beast might have done, and that in the presence of God. He looked only at the things which are seen and temporal, at the things of sense, like the beasts that perish. The things which are unseen and eternal, the spiritual things, the things which relate to a

future state, he took no account of. In the light which he has received he sees how grievous was his mistake, and humbles himself before God on account thereof. Pride and spiritual enlightenment are incompatible. They cannot co-exist. When we are at a distance from God, and walking in darkness, we may conceitedly criticise His ways, and rashly pronounce judgment upon His doings. But let a man enter into the sanctuary of God and there commune with Him, and his soul will be humbled, his pride and presumption perish, and in self-abasement he will bow before God. Criticism now gives place to worship. Presumption is changed into adoration.

"The more Thy glories strike mine eyes
The humbler I shall lie."

The victorious soul is profoundly humble; and cries, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory." It is the revelation of the abounding grace of God that produces the deepest humility in us, and the manifestation of His glory that prostrates us in lowliest self-abasement.

II. Sublime Confidence in God.

The Psalmist had a glorious assurance of—

1. *The constant presence of God.* "I am continually with Thee." He says this not as an assertion of His faithfulness to God, but of God's faithfulness to him, notwithstanding his ignorance, and folly, and unbelief. Evermore God besets us behind and before, and lays His hand upon us for good. We may wander from Him, but He does not abandon us. In our sorrow and blinded by our tears we may see in Him nothing more than an unsympathetic "gardener," but it is He Himself continually with us, and waiting to bless us. Our unworthiness does not drive Him away from us. Through all the dark wanderings of our doubting and perplexed souls He accompanies us. And when we seek for Him, lo! He is at hand to help us, and to "compass us about with songs of deliverance."

2. *The unfailing support of God.* "Thou hast holden me by my right hand." As for the Psalmist, his "feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped," and he would have fallen had not God upheld him. In the trying journey when the little, weak hand of the child can no longer retain its hold upon the father, the father feels the relaxing grasp, and with his strong hand holds the little, weak one, and so leads and supports the dear child in safety. And so the heavenly Father supports us, His weak and erring children. Blessed be His name! "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with," &c. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," &c. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The promises of His Holy Word, and the experience of His people, and especially *His own character*, give to us most encouraging assurance of His unfailing support. He will never forsake even the most imperfect of His people.

3. *The infallible guidance of God.* Asaph had tried his own counsel, and found it folly. He had made experiment of his own knowledge, and dis-

covered it to be ignorance as of a beast. Now, with unfaltering confidence, He turns to the Divine counsel for guidance. He is willing that God should determine His destiny, that He should choose the path by which that destiny shall be reached, and he is confident that the destiny will be a glorious one. He who is guided through life by God—(1) *Will never go astray.* He cannot err. "His understanding is infinite." He is perfectly acquainted with the traveller, and knows well every step of the road. (2) *Will enjoy the highest companionship.* "He Himself shall be with them, walking in the way, and the foolish shall not err therein." Our hearts burn within us while He walks with us by the way, and opens to us the Scriptures. This companionship is—(α) *Enlightening.* (β) *Strengthening.* (γ) *Transforming.* "We are changed into the same image." (3) *Will be conducted to Divine honours.* "Afterward receive me to glory." Oh, that "afterwards"! What surprises of joy and blessedness God has for us in the endless "afterwards"!

4. *The all-sufficiency of God.* Asaph cannot sufficiently exalt the Lord his God. He regards Him as—(1) *Superior to every other good that he possessed or desired.* "Whom have I in heaven, but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." In heaven, with all its high and holy, its wise and strong intelligences, he had no helper and saviour but God. And upon earth he had found no one who could satisfy the necessities and longings of the soul like God. Deep within each one of us there is the consciousness of guilt, we long for *pardon*. He alone has authority to say unto us, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." There are times when we are oppressed with the consciousness of moral weakness, we feel unable to live holily and labour usefully, we long for *help*. He alone can say, "My grace is sufficient for thee." We feel our mortality, yet shrink from death, we long deeply and intensely for *immortal and blessed life*. He alone can say, "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Our hearts are

made to love and to be loved, we long for the love of some perfect being who will accept our affection and reciprocate it, in whom we realise the fulfilment of our highest ideal of excellence, and who will abide with us for ever. He, and He alone, can satisfy this longing. He loves us with an infinite love, He craves our love. He is the supremely Beautiful, the All-perfect One, and He is eternal. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" &c. (2) *Adequate to the soul's needs when all other resources fail.* "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength," &c. He looks onward to the time of his dissolution, feels by anticipation the exhaustion of his physical powers, and his heart, the seat of vitality, failing him, and all human aids of no avail, and he is confident that even then he would find in his God all that he needed. "When other helpers fail and comforts flee," and our heart faints and fails, He will be "the Rock of our heart and our portion for ever." His resources are adequate to all our needs. In all the unknown possibilities of our

future no want can occur to us which He will not be able to supply. And His love is as great as His resources. Both are infinite.

5. *The righteousness of the government of God* (vers. 27, 28). Of this he has not now the shadow of a doubt. Those who depart from God depart from life, and light, and blessedness. They "shall perish." God will "destroy them." Those who draw near to God shall find it good so to do. In His presence and fellowship there are life and "fulness of joy." Of all this he is confident. He speaks with the clear accent of strong conviction. He is so assured that all God's ways and works are just and right that he will declare them to others. Draw near to God, my brother, and His smile will banish all your darkness, and brighten and beautify your life. Heartily trust Him, and you will have occasion joyously to praise Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. *How gloriously victorious are they whose confidence in God is strong.* 2. *How blessed are they who have God for their portion.*

THE GOOD MAN'S PRESENT, PAST, AND FUTURE.

(Verses 23, 24.)

What the Psalmist says of himself in these words merits much consideration. Observe—

I. His present experience. "I am continually with Thee." Every good man is with his God—in a way of *communion*, in a way of *affection*, in a way of *delight*, in a way of *desire*, and in a way of *service*.

II. His retrospective testimony. "Thou hast holden me by my right hand." His experience has been realised by God's people in every age; from them, therefore, his acknowledgment is due, and by them it will be readily made.

III. His prospective consolation. This is twofold, and respects *what God*

secures to him in this life. How necessary is guidance considering our various difficulties and dangers. And it is proper always, from a consciousness that God alone can guide us, to ask of Him the guidance of His *Word*, of His *Spirit*, and of His *Providence*.

What God secures to him in the life to come. Glory is that to which we may look forward, as the consummation of our bliss; and in the expectation of this, we may rejoice, even as if we were already in possession of it.

Let us, then, be stirred up to humble inquiry, and to devout adoration.—*W. Sleight.*

DEPARTING FROM GOD.

(Verse 27.)

Distance from God.

I. What it is. "Go a whoring from Thee." Alienation from Him—1. Of *fidelity*. 2. Of *affection*. 3. Of *worship*.

II. What it leads to. Ruin, destruction. 1. *Certain.* "Thou hast destroyed." 2. *Complete.* "Perish, . . . destroyed."

DRAWING NIGH TO GOD.

(Verse 28.)

"It is good for me to draw near to God."

God is not far from any one of us. He is everywhere present. But to draw near to Him is to endeavour to realise His presence with us, to feel Him near, to commune with Him.

I. How may we draw near to God.

1. By devoutly reading His Word. 2. By meditation on Him. 3. By prayer to Him. 4. By praise of Him. 5. By imitating Him in life and work.

II. When should we draw near to God. We should at all times live near to Him. But there are times when we

should specially seek His helpful Presence. 1. In time of *painful doubt*. 2. In time of *suffering*. 3. In time of *gladness* we should draw near to Him with our gratitude. 4. When entering upon and toiling in *difficult enterprises*.

III. The advantages of drawing near to God. By so doing, 1. *Faith* increased. 2. *Suffering* is removed, or more grace is given to the sufferer, and the suffering is sanctified. 3. *Gladness* is hallowed and increased. 4. *Wisdom* and strength are imparted for difficult duties.

THE GOOD MAN'S ACCESS, TRUST, AND TESTIMONY.

(Verse 28.)

I. The blessedness of the good man's access to God.

II. The strength of the good man's trust in God.

III The clearness of the good man's testimony for God.

All doubt is gone. With confident, glad, and grateful heart, he longs to "declare all His works."

PSALM LXXIV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Maschil of Asaph," i.e., an Instruction of Asaph, a Didactic Song by Asaph. See introduction to Ps. l.

"But here we cannot have the least idea of the authorship belonging to David's time. We must not, however, on this account convict the title of a mistake: for just in proportion as the contents are decidedly and manifestly inconsistent with David's age, was it unlikely that the title would announce that the Psalm was composed at that time. Asaph was the founder of a family of singers, who went by the name of the sons of Asaph, even in the time of Isaiah (Comp. 2 Chron. xxxv. 15), yea, even in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ez. ii. 41, iii. 10; Neh. vii. 44, xi. 22). That the Holy Ghost, who inspired the founder, continued to exert His influence upon the members of this family from age to age, is manifest from the example of Jehaziel, one of the sons of Asaph in Jehoshaphat's time, on whom the spirit of the Lord came down in the midst of the assembly (2 Chron. xx. 14). All the sacred compositions of the members of this family were designated *songs of Asaph*, just as in the title of the lxii. Psalm, Jeduthun stands for the Jeduthunic choir. If the family had not possessed a founder so very famous in this department, these Psalms, like those which bear the name of the sons of Korah, would have had inscribed on their titles 'the sons of Asaph.'"—Hengstenberg.

Occasion.—On this expositors are not agreed. Some think that it was written by Asaph, in David's time, with a prophetic reference to the destruction by the Chaldeans. Others look upon it as historical, and having reference to the destructions wrought at the time of the Macabees. Others, who regard it as historical, consider that it refers to the Chaldean destruction. The occasion cannot be determined certainly; but the last-named opinion seems to us most likely to be the correct one. It was written at a time of great misery, the temple was desolated and destroyed, the land was ravaged, the enemies of the Church triumphed, and God seemed to have forgotten or cast away His people. The Psalmist bewails their sad condition and prays for deliverance.

THE SUFFERING CHURCH POURING OUT ITS COMPLAINTS UNTO GOD.

(Verses 1-11.)

I. The description of the Church.

"The sheep of Thy pasture ; Thy congregation which Thou hast purchased," &c. The Church is here represented as—

1. *Shepherded by God.* We use the word "shepherded," because we do not know of any other which expresses the various duties of the shepherd to his flock. That Jehovah is the Shepherd of His people is an idea of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures. (Psalms lxxx. 1, xcv. 7, c. 3 ; Isa. xl. 11 ; Ezek. xxxiv. 11-16.) The relationship involves His *Guidance*. With infallible knowledge and tender care He goeth before His people through all their journeyings. By the mystic and majestic pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night He led His people in their forty years' journey through the wilderness. And still He leads His people, though by different means. He guides us now by the indications of Providence, by influencing our convictions, and by the teaching of His Word. The relationship involves *Protection*. The shepherd had to guard his flock against the attacks of robbers and beasts of prey ; and frequently displayed great faithfulness and courage in so doing. In this way David, while a mere stripling, slew a lion and a bear (1 Sam. xvii. 34-36). So Jehovah guards His people. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people," &c. The relationship involves *Provision*. It was the duty of the shepherd to provide for his sheep, and when one pasture was bare to lead them to another, or when the herbage was deficient to cut down the tender shoots of trees for them to eat, and to see that they had water to drink. In thus providing for them the shepherd frequently underwent long and severe labour. Jehovah thus provides for "His people, and the sheep of His pasture." "The Lord is my Shepherd ; I shall not want." His provisions are *varied, abundant, exhaustless*.

2. *Redeemed by God.* The Church is spoken of as "purchased of old" by

God, and as an inheritance "redeemed" by Him. From Egyptian bondage He redeemed them at an immense cost. The Church is an ancient possession of the Lord's. He has the most indefeasible right to it as His inheritance. It is His because He called it into being. It owes its origin to Him. He has preserved it in being, watching over it in all the vicissitudes of its fortune. Much of its history resembles the burning bush—"the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed," and the secret of its mysterious preservation must be traced to Him. He has redeemed it. His ancient people He frequently redeemed out of the hand of their enemies. And the Church to-day He has redeemed with a nobler, Diviner redemption. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ; but with the precious blood of Christ." He "gave Himself for us." What a SELF to give ! And how freely was He given by both His Father and Himself ! How unspeakably precious is this redemption ! How complete and indisputable God's title to an inheritance so redeemed !

3. *Inhabited by God.* "Mount Zion wherein Thou hast dwelt." The mysterious Shekinah, the symbol of God's special presence, dwelt in the holy of holies. In the Psalms God is represented as both dwelling in His people, and the dwelling-place of His people. "God is in the midst of her." "In Salem is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion." So in the Christian Church God is specially present. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." He dwells in His Church to hear and answer prayer, to reveal His will, to bestow His grace, to make known His salvation, and to manifest His glory. He dwells in every humble and believing heart as in His temple by the Holy Ghost.

Reflect how the consideration of these aspects of the Church in relation to God would affect His people. They were

"the sheep of His pasture," yet they were in captivity, and oppressed by their enemies, and far away from Zion. How could they reconcile these things with the guidance, protection, and provision of their Shepherd? They were redeemed by Him at a great cost, yet now they were once more in bondage. Had He ceased to value the inheritance which He had "purchased of old"? They were inhabited by God, but now the glory of His presence has departed. Had He then cast them off for ever? Thus there have often been times when the position and sufferings of the Church have seemed utterly irreconcilable with their most fundamental relations to God.

II. The distress of the Church.

1. *Their enemies triumphed over them and spread ruin around them.* They had destroyed everything in the sanctuary, had broken down the carved work, had burnt it with fire, and desecrated it to the ground. The Jews gloried in their temple. They spoke of it as a "holy and beautiful house." It was a costly and magnificent edifice. Around it were gathered many precious and sacred memories. Its associations were most interesting and treasured. To see it ruthlessly destroyed and profaned must have been a great distress to them. The Church in all ages has had its enemies who have sought its destruction. With captious and destructive criticism men seek to destroy the Church, by endeavouring to overthrow the faith of her members in many precious truths in which they have rested. The Church has had foes who have persecuted her by fire and sword, bonds and imprisonments, pains and penalties. Different are the weapons which are used to-day. The theories and arguments of cold intellectual men—men often of large heads, but infinitesimally small hearts; whose knowledge has "grown from more to more," but in whom no reverence dwells—are the weapons by which it is now sought to overthrow the Church. She has spiritual foes also. "The gates of hell" are arrayed against her. And many in this world by word and deed are foes to the cause of God.

2. *Their enemies blasphemed the name*

of God. Where God had been reverently worshipped by devout hearts they madly shouted their war cry, in the temple they had set up their military standards, and they had reproached and blasphemed the name of God. This was a great grief to the people of God. And to those of them who were faithful and pious the grief would be most deep and acute. The godly heart is most deeply pained in its tenderest part when anything is done by which God is dishonoured. And this blasphemy had been long continued, adding amazement to the grief of the Psalmist, and causing him to inquire, "O God, *how long* shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name *for ever*?" (1) *Man is free to reproach and blaspheme God if he will.* We may praise and adore Him, or revile and curse Him if we will. God has made us thus morally free. He allows us the exercise of this freedom. (2) *God has long patience even with the profanest and most outrageous sinners.* For a long season He tolerates even blasphemers, giving them time for repentance. He waits to show mercy even to the chief of sinners. He wills not that any should perish. (3) *God's patience with blasphemers causes sore amazement to His people.* They cannot understand why He does not pluck His hand out of His bosom and smite them. They cry, "O God, *how long*?" Assuredly, not for ever. If the wicked "turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow, and made it ready." But while judgment lingers, and men continue to blaspheme, the people of God are distressed by the blasphemy, and amazed at the delay of judgment.

3. *The prophetic voice was silent.* The prophetic office of Jeremiah terminated with the destruction of the temple. "It was assuredly the cessation of his office that more immediately gave occasion to the painful cry: there is no longer any prophet. This standing ruin of the prophetic class proclaimed, even in louder accents than the non-appearance of other prophets, that God was no longer Israel's King. It was necessary that along with the other signs of the dominion of God, this one also should cease for a long period of time, that the people might be

taught how they had treated it, wherein they had offended, and might, at the same time, be led with tears of repentance to seek its return."—*Hengstenberg*. The cry of the Psalmist reminds me of the words of Saul to the apparition of Samuel, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." Well may he be distressed! Man cut off from God—severed from the great central Life and Light of the universe—appealing to heaven, and being answered only by stony-hearted silence! How appalling! God had threatened, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land," &c. (Amos viii. 11, 12; Comp. Ezek. vii. 26.) That time had come. "Her prophets found no vision from the Lord." Distress had come upon the people; and no prophet's voice was heard, either in merciful encouragement, or faithful rebuke, or stern threatening. They have treated the prophetic message with scornful indifference at times, and at times they have cruelly persecuted the Heaven-sent messenger; and now they cry for some word from heaven, some communication from the Divine, and the only answer they receive is inexorable silence. Surely there is warning for us here. How do we treat the great and precious privileges which are granted unto us? The Word of God, do we prize it? The opportunities of worship, are they dear to us? The influence of the Holy Spirit, do we value it? do we profit by it? If we fail to appreciate our spiritual privileges, and practically despise them, God may withdraw them from us, and we may awake to a sense of their value *too late*.

"Like birds whose beauties languish, half-conceal'd

Till mounted on the wing, their glossy plumes
Expanded shine with azure, green, and gold;
How blessings brighten as they take their flight."—*Young*.

Let us prize the gifts of God while we have them, lest God should remove them from us for ever.

4. *God in anger had cast them off.*
So they thought; and it was true that

their miseries came upon them in consequence of their sins. God was visiting them with the rod of chastisement because of their idolatry, their spiritual apostasy, and rebellion. Their Babylonian enemies were unwittingly the agents of God to punish them. But God had not cast them off for ever. When they turned unto Him in true repentance, He turned unto them and had mercy upon them. Yet at this time they could see no sign of His favour. His anger seemed to smoke against them. Such were some of the distresses of the ancient Church. Their foes were triumphant and were spreading ruin on every side, even destroying their best treasures; the name of God was blasphemed, the prophetic voice was silent, and God seemed to have abandoned them. Their distresses are a picture and parable of sufferings which have befallen the Church in other ages. Their distresses were on account of their sins. So also in subsequent times, in some instances, the Church has been tried and chastened by reason of error, or unfaithfulness, or lukewarmness. In every time of suffering let the Church seek to ascertain the cause and meaning of her suffering; and if it be God's expostulation with her for her sins, let her repent and do her first works, or He will remove her candlestick out of its place.

III. The prayers of the distressed Church.

1. *That God would remember them.*
God seemed to have forgotten them. They seemed to have passed away from His mind. He bestows no attention upon them. They entreat Him to remember them, thinking that, if He turned His attention to them and saw their miseries, He would surely deliver and save them.

2. *That God would interpose for them.*
"Lift up thy footsteps unto the eternal ruins." "The Psalmist speaks of *eternal* ruins, because the complete destruction had cut off all human hope of a restoration." Man could not deliver them. Their only hope was in God. They pray Him to hasten His approach to them. In the day of their distress they have to seek help from Him whom they

neglected in their prosperity, for He alone can help them.

3. *That God would interpose for them speedily.* God's help seemed to them long delayed. They were weary of waiting for His appearing. "O God, *how long* shall the adversary approach? shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name for ever?" They longed to hear the sound of the chariot wheels of their Deliverer. They knew not that the waiting for His coming was itself a blessing. Their sufferings made the time seem long. Their anxiety made them impatient. But God delays His salvation until the captivity has fulfilled its mission to them, and suffering has done its work in them, and waiting itself has blessed them.

There is something very touching and effective in the form of expression adopted by the Psalmist in addressing the Lord. "The sheep of Thy pasture. Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old; Thine inheritance, which Thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion in which Thou hast dwelt." He thus brings before Him His interpositions for them in former times, His ancient loving-kindness for them, His relation to them, and His

having dwelt in Zion. Thus he pleads not their own misery only, but His mercy also; not their need only, but His fulness and power also, and their relation to Him. Surely He will listen to such pleadings. He will not leave His sheep to perish, or lose His ancient purchase, or suffer His inheritance to be entirely desolated, or leave His glorious dwelling-place a ruin for ever.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the enemies of the Church of God take warning.* Let them not interpret His silence as non-existence, or construe His patience into powerlessness. He lives, and His arm has lost none of its ancient strength.

2. *Let those who are richly blessed with spiritual privileges remember that they involve corresponding responsibilities.* Be wise, prize them, improve them, lest they be the occasion of greater condemnation to you.

3. *Let the favoured Church be warned.* Be faithful, or God may write "Ichabod" upon your temples and altars.

4. *Let the suffering Church take encouragement from her relationship to God, and from His past interpositions on her behalf, and learn how to plead them at His throne.*

THE CONSTRUCTIVE AND THE DESTRUCTIVE.

(Verses 5, 6.)

Destruction is sometimes a wise and good employment. It is wise and good to destroy disease, error, evil. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." But destruction is inferior to construction.

I. The constructive is greater and more difficult than the destructive. An idiot might destroy St. Paul's Cathedral, London; but it needed the genius of Sir C. Wren to design it. A child might destroy a young oak sapling; but the mightiest man cannot create a daisy. A fool might unsettle a man's faith and destroy his character; but the wisest and holiest of men cannot of himself establish a man's faith and build up his character.

II. In the kingdom of the truth it is wiser and nobler to aim at building up the true than destroying the false.

1. *It is wiser;* for you may destroy one error only to make room for another. One evil spirit is expelled, but "other spirits more wicked than himself" enter in his place. But he who builds up the true is effectually destroying old errors and guarding against the entrance of new ones.

2. *It is nobler.* In destroying even the false and bad, men are often actuated by mean and base motives and feelings, but in aiming at edification in the true and good the motives and feelings are noble.

III. How terrible is it to destroy the true and good! To destroy a noble

building, a magnificent city; to destroy life, virtue, truth, beauty, how heinous is this!

IV. God is the great constructor of

the good. He is ever engaged in overcoming error and evil by building up souls in truth and grace.

Let us imitate Him in this.

THE SUFFERING CHURCH RECOUNTING THE DOINGS OF GOD IN THE PAST AS AN ARGUMENT FOR HIS HELP IN THE PRESENT.

(Verses 12-17.)

The poet, in calling to mind and celebrating the interpositions of God on behalf of His people in former times, brings into prominence the Divine Sovereignty. From that Sovereignty, as it had been manifested in past deliverances and blessings, he drew encouragement for himself and the people in their present distresses.

I. The history of God's dealings with His people reveals His universal sovereignty.

1. *He is sovereign over His people.* "God is my King." The people of God loyally and heartily recognise His sovereignty over them. He is sovereign over all men; but His sovereignty is not acknowledged by all men. There are those who disown it and rebel against it; there are others who meanly and slavishly submit to it from base motives. But His own people recognise its righteousness, and wisdom, and goodness, and cordially own Him as their King. To them His "law is holy, and His commandment holy, and just, and good." He occupies the throne of their affections. In the hearts of His people He is supreme. They serve Him with willing minds. They bow to His authority with loyalty, and love, and reverence.

2. *He is sovereign over His enemies.* Expositors are pretty generally agreed that by "the dragons" and the "leviathan" whose heads were broken in the waters, the poet intended to set forth the Egyptians and their Pharaoh who were destroyed in the Red Sea. God manifested His sovereignty over them by destroying them for their rebellion against Him, and for their oppression of His people. They would not submit themselves to His authority, so He crushed them by His power. God is sovereign over all men, whether they

acknowledge Him or not. The rebellion of the wicked in no way diminishes His right to reign, or His power to do all His pleasure. He is King. "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet."

3. *He is sovereign over nature.* The Psalmist speaks of Him as dividing the sea, cleaving the fountain and flood, drying up mighty rivers, preparing the light and the sun, setting all the borders of the earth, making summer and winter. God is not only the great Creator of the universe, but its Sustainer also. We discover in nature not only wise and beneficent laws, but a Lawgiver also. We are acquainted with great forces, and are persuaded that there must be some intelligent and almighty Being who originated and sustains them. We mark a beautiful order and arrangement in nature, and regard them as signs of a Divine presence and power. He is but a superficial student of nature who never pursues his investigations beyond the discovery of mere laws and forces. To the devout and earnest listener nature is eloquent of God. God is the sovereign of nature. He controls her forces. He regulates her operations. He presides over all her processes. He is supreme in all. There is no province of His universe from which He is excluded. His sovereignty is complete and universal. He rules over all nature and all life. The life of the ephemera sporting its little hour in the rays of the summer sun, and the life of the archangel standing in His own presence, are both subject to Him.

II. The History of God's dealings with His people reveals the beneficence of His sovereignty.

God is a "King working salvation in the midst of the earth." God is actively engaged in every department of His

universe. He is the supreme Worker. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." In the operations of nature He ceaselessly works. In the events of history He works, aiding His servants, restraining the wrath of His foes, directing and controlling all things, so that in the end truth and righteousness and love may be triumphant everywhere. And He works in human souls, delivering them from sin, and educating them into holy living and useful working. The Psalmist recognised the work of God in the past history of His people. He had brought them forth from Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm. He had smitten their enemies with destruction. He had led them through the sea as on dry land. He had wrought for their salvation. It is of the very nature of His sovereignty to work beneficently. And the salvation which He works is gloriously complete. This the Psalmist indicates by the words, "*Working salvation in the midst of the earth.*" "The words denote the comprehensive nature of the salvation: whoever has obtained possession of the interior of a country has got the ascendancy over the whole boundaries,—whatever is done there extends to the whole circumference" (Exod. viii. 22; Isa. x. 23). What God undertakes He carries to completion. His salvation is "unto the uttermost." He is "mighty to save." Let us rejoice in God's sovereignty. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad." Man has sadly misrepresented His sovereignty. We have contemplated with horror representations of a Being of unlimited and arbitrary power, which power is often used to crush and curse his creatures, a power which, except in the case of a favourite few, works destruction in the midst of the land. Such is *not* the sovereignty of God. His rule is a thing of infinite wisdom, and goodness, and beauty. He doeth all things

well. Under His sovereignty the race is advancing not to darkness and night, but to the glad and beautiful morning of eternal day. The beneficence of the work of God is seen by the Psalmist *when he looks at it through the intervening years*. While it is yet in process we cannot discover the significance or beauty of His work. While events are in progress they often seem chaotic, and sometimes even maleficent. Wait until the work has advanced to a period, and then the design of the great Worker will be before you a thing of joy and beauty.

III. The history of God's dealings with His people is full of encouragement to them.

The poet recounts the doings of Israel's King to encourage their hearts in their time of distress. His past interpositions are so many reasons for our placing our trust in Him in every time of need. God is unchangeable and eternal,—"*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*" He is unchangeable in *power*: what He has done already He can do again. He is unchangeable in *purpose*. The design and tendency of His government is to "*work salvation.*" "He is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent." He is unchangeable in *goodness*: what He willed to do in the past He will do again. "He abideth faithful." So past deliverances and blessings encourage us to plead with Him, and to trust Him for help in present distresses. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let us rejoice in the beneficence and universality of the Divine Sovereignty.* God—the Supremely Good—is King. He rules in righteousness, wisdom, and love. 2. *Let the troubled heart take encouragement from God's relationship to him, and past dealings with him.* He who has led you hitherto will never fail you or forsake you.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

(Verse 12.)

In the time of trouble to which this Psalm refers the Psalmist took encour-

agement from the consideration of God's sovereignty. His kingship implies

authority. As a Sovereign He proclaims His laws for the government of His subjects. And these laws involve penalties for those who violate them, and rewards for those who obey and honour them. God's kingship implies the *protection of His people.* It is the duty of kings to protect their subjects in the enjoyment of their rights. God is our shield. God's sovereignty is *moral.* He rules by reason, not by force. The laws which He prescribes are in harmony with the laws of our own nature. Thus, He has made us morally free, and His sovereignty never invades our freedom. He never coerces man into obedience.

In the text His sovereignty is presented in several aspects.

I. As loyally acknowledged. "My King." The sovereignty of God is universal in its extent, but is only partially acknowledged. There are those who utterly deny it, and are avowed *rebels* against His government. There are others who acknowledge it as *slaves.* If they obey His rule at all, it is because they feel compelled to do so by dread of the lash. There are others who acknowledge it as *hirelings.* They avoid transgression lest they should incur severe penalties; they obey that they might receive the reward of obedience. But there is no spontaneity or heartiness in their obedience. There are others who acknowledge it heartily as *loyal subjects.* They recognise and admire the justice and benevolence of His laws, and the wisdom of their administration; they cordially acknowledge His right to reign; they venerate Him as their King and God. What is our relation to this government? Are we rebels? slaves? hirelings? or loyal subjects?

II. As of ancient date. "Of old." God's sovereignty has existed from everlasting as regards Himself. His fitness for rule, His right to rule, His purpose to rule, are all eternal as Himself. In the solitude of the awful eternity He was supreme. As to His sovereignty over the Jews, by the term "of old" the Psalmist referred to the days when God brought His people out of Egypt with signs, and wonders, and great

power. His sovereignty over them may be traced back to the call of Abram. His sovereignty over us began with the beginning of our being, and is coextensive with our being. Earthly monarchs pride themselves upon the antiquity of their dynasties. Here is a dynasty which no beginning knew. "Thy kingdom is established of old; Thou art from everlasting."

III. As beneficent in operation. "Working salvation." God's sovereignty is,—1. *Operative.* God works. "He is not sitting down in what men call everlasting repose, calmly or indifferently marking the operations of the universe, and luxuriating in a peace which no storm can invade. That is not the kind of God which guilty, weary, broken-hearted man requires." He works in *nature, in history, in redemption.* 2. *Operates beneficently.* The King works *salvation.* God's sovereignty has been grievously misinterpreted. Human notions of favouritism have been set down to God's sovereignty. Men have formulated a doctrine of reprobation, and have had the audacity to call it God's sovereignty. Most firmly do we believe in His sovereignty, but we believe in it as "*working salvation.*" Of the King it was predicted, "He is just and having salvation." God rules to bless. He works to save men, not to destroy them.

But is it really so? Does God's government work beneficently? At this time, as the Psalm indicates, His people were in a most desolate and afflicted state. Was the King working for their salvation? Their misery arose from their sin, from their rebellion against His government. At present darkness, suffering, and sorrow are here; but they are here because sin is here. God rules to bless.

IV. As a plea for His help. So the Psalmist uses it on this occasion. He mentions what God had done for them in olden time, and pleads that as their King He would interpose for them again. As their King,—1. *He would possess sovereign authority.* None could stay His hand or say unto Him, what dost Thou? He could smite down their foes, and set them free and prosper

them. 2. *He would be faithful to His sovereign obligations.* He would keep His promises and "respect the covenant," as they entreated Him to do (ver. 20). 3. *He was immutable.* He was the same when this Psalm was written as when He divided the Red Sea. He changes not. And still He has sovereign power to save, and is faithful and unchangeable; and still we may urge His sovereignty as a reason why He should help us. A powerful reason it

is. It appeals to His honour, acknowledges His beneficence, &c. This plea may be used by us,—(1) *As communities forming part of His Church.* When any portion of His Church languishes, or is afflicted, or is in difficulty, it may plead with the King for help. (2) *As individuals on our own behalf.* In our times of perplexity and distress let us go to our King, and plead with Him for guidance and deliverance.

GOD IN NATURE.

(Verses 16, 17.)

The poet was neither, 1. *An atheist.* He believed in God. Nor, 2. *A pantheist.* He believed in God as distinct from nature. Nor, 3. *A mere naturalist,* seeing nothing in nature higher than order, and law, and development. He recognised *God in nature.* He regards God as—

I. **The Creator of nature.** "Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth. Thou hast made summer and winter." God being the Creator of nature, nature is a revelation of God, and as such should be studied by us. He is a superficial or partial student who has not advanced beyond the discovery of laws. Nature reveals the Divine, 1. *Power* in her stupendous forces. 2. *Unchangeableness* in the regularity and order of her revolutions. 3. *Wisdom* in her marvellous and beautiful adaptations of means to ends. 4. *Goodness* in her ample provisions for the needs of both man and beast. 5. *Delight in beauty* in the countless forms of loveliness, sublimity, and grandeur in earth and sea and sky.

"These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty, Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair; Thyself how wondrous
then!
Unspeakable, who sitt'st above these heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these Thy lowest works; yet these
declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power
Divine."—Milton.

II. **The Proprietor of nature.** "The day is Thine, the night also is Thine." He who created has the most indubitable right to His own creations. God being Proprietor of nature, it follows: 1. *That we are but stewards.* The wealthiest man cannot call an acre absolutely his own. 2. *Large possessions involve large responsibilities.* We hold our possessions in trust for Him. He who holds most has most accountability. 3. *God will call all men to give an account of their stewardship.*

III. **The Sustainer of nature.** The boundaries of the earth remain. Day and night, summer and winter, still alternate as of old. God's sustenance of nature should inspire man to trust in Him.

THE SUFFERING CHURCH PLEADING THE FAITHFULNESS AND HONOUR OF GOD AS AN ARGUMENT FOR HIS INTERPOSITION.

(Verses 18-23.)

The sorrowful complaint of the suffering people of God passed into a rehearsal of His former glorious doings on their behalf, which was eminently

adapted to inspire and strengthen their faith. And now that rehearsal passes into earnest pleading with God, such pleading that has "power with

God and prevails." The Psalmist pleads—

I. The attitude of their enemies to Him.

The enemies of Israel were arrayed in avowed hostility to God, they blasphemed His name daily, they rose tumultuously against Him, therefore His people call upon Him to plead His own cause and subdue His foes and theirs.

1. *Their enemies blasphemed Him.* "Remember this, the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and the foolish people have blasphemed Thy name: remember how the foolish man reproacheth Thee daily." What was done against the people of God may in an important sense be said to be a reproach offered to Him. But more than that is meant here. These cruel persecutors were also profane and daring blasphemers. By oppressing and reviling His people they offered insult and hurled reproach to Him. They had also directly and scandalously blasphemed Him. Yet God forbore to smite them. No lightnings strike them. No thunders alarm them. And His people were amazed at this. These blasphemers were *foolish* people. "The *foolish* people have blasphemed Thy name, . . . the *foolish* man reproacheth Thee daily." Wickedness is essential folly. The sinner is a great fool. He is so because (1) *He is wilfully pursuing a course which is incompatible with his true well-being.* The conditions upon which alone the noblest capacities and faculties of his being can be developed he rejects with scorn. The highest and divinest joys of life he is a stranger to. (2) *He is educating himself for a dark and miserable hereafter.* He is qualifying himself for hell—the hell of sinful habits, evil and furious passions, accusing and tormenting memories, and black and threatening prospects. (3) *He is contending against irresistible forces.* Truth, righteousness, love are against him, and they are eternal and must conquer. God is against him. The sinner is a worm fighting against Almightyness. The enemies of God, unless they submit to Him, must be crushed. No sinners are

greater fools than those who ridicule religion and reproach the religious. If religion be true, then the folly of those who ridicule it is utter, egregious, and ruinous. If religion be false, then it becomes the duty of those who have made the discovery to lead the religious to truth and reality, and not to treat them with reproach.

2. *Their enemies loudly opposed Him.* "Forget not the voice of Thine enemies: the tumult of those that rise up against Thee increaseth continually." The wicked were clamorous in their fury against Him, and for the destruction of His people. They were making war against Him with loud and defiant cries, like the shouts of battle. They were challenging God to combat.

3. All this is urged by the inspired poet as a *reason why God should arise in defence of His own cause and that of His people.* These enemies were doing their utmost to tarnish and sully the glory of His name; would He submit to that? They were openly aspersing His honour; would He not appear in self-vindication? Fools were loudly bidding Him defiance; would He not smite them with perpetual dumbness? If He did not care for the sufferings of His people, was He not jealous of His own glory? If He was indifferent as to their cause, was He also indifferent as to His own? "Arise, O God, plead Thine own cause," and so send us deliverance from our enemies, for they are Thy foes. It is well when the suffering Church can plead for deliverance on the ground that her enemies are also the enemies of God, and that His interests and hers are identical. It is also well when the suffering Church, in strong assurance of the identity of her interests and God's, can wait with confident expectation and calm patience for His interposition.

II. Their own relation to Him.

1. *They were His turtle-dove.* "O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude." By comparing themselves to a turtle-dove they plead (1) *Their helplessness.* They were weak and utterly defenceless against the fierce host of their foes, if His protec-

tion were withdrawn. This is a plea which moves the heart of God. "When I am weak, then am I strong." (2) *The plaintiveness and incessancy of their cry to Him.* "The turtle pours forth from every garden, grove, and wooded hill its melancholy yet soothing ditty, unceasingly from early dawn till sunset. It is from its plaintive note, doubtless, that the Psalmist, in pouring forth his lament to God, compares himself to a turtle-dove."—Smith's *Bible Dict.* The cry of God's defenceless people was rising constantly and mournfully to Him for His help. Could He close His ear to such appeals? (3) *Their constancy to Him in the future.* "From its habit of pairing for life, and its fidelity for its mate, the turtle was a symbol of purity" and faithfulness of affection. The suffering people could not plead their faithfulness to Him in the past. They had wandered far from Him, and often. "The turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord." But henceforth, as His turtle-dove, they will be constant in their love to Him. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" Let Him have mercy upon them, and they would never forsake Him again.

2. *They were the congregation of His poor.* God had manifested frequently a special interest in the poor. Those who were specially needy were the objects of His special care. He was pre-eminently the Friend of the fatherless and widow, the afflicted and broken in heart. He had issued particular commands for the treatment of the poor. "I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land." Some of the sternest denunciations of the prophets were directed against those who oppressed the poor. "God has chosen the poor of this world." They plead that they were His poor, yet they were sorely distressed, and He seemed as though He had forgotten them. Would He forget them for ever? They were His poor, they were His turtle-dove; would He not appear on

behalf of His own? Was their night of oppression to last for ever? Oh, when would He cause their day to dawn by coming to their help?

3. *They were His covenanted people.* "Have respect unto Thy covenant." This is the sublimest and most effectual plea of all. Circumstances such as they were now placed in had been described by God through His servant Moses, and He had said, "If then their hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land" (Lev. xxvi. 33-45). "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said it, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips (Psalm lxxxix. 30-34). The appeal is made to the truth and faithfulness of God. "If we believe not, He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." How much more will He abide faithful if His people, even in darkness and distress, do believe, and plead His promises, and urge Him to fulfil them! Certainly, if their punishment has done its work in them, if they are truly and sufficiently humbled and penitent, He will respect His covenant by delivering them from their distresses. But, if their sufferings have not led them to genuine and thorough repentance of their sins, He will respect His covenant by withholding His help until they turn to Him with all their heart. He cannot forget His covenant. His faithfulness cannot fail. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away."

CONCLUSION.—Here are, at least, three lessons for suffering Christians or churches in their pleadings with God. 1. *Let us urge His mercy towards us rather than the claims of our miseries upon Him.* Perhaps our miseries are all deserved. 2. *Let us trust His promises rather than the force or fervour of*

our petitions. The heartiest prayer does not merit any blessing. 3. *If we have broken our share of the covenant, let us be thankful that He abideth faithful, and that in His covenant provision is made for the pardon and restoration of transgressors.* "Take with you words, and

turn to the Lord : say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously : so will we render the calves of our lips. . . . I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely : for Mine anger is turned away from him."

THE CHURCH A TURTLE-DOVE.

(Verse 19.)

I. The church of God is like a turtle-dove. 1. *In innocence and inoffensiveness.* 2. *In defencelessness.* We have no defence, but God. Left to ourselves, we are helpless. 3. *In purity.* "Purifying your hearts by faith." 4. *In fidelity of affection.* (See Smith's *Bible Dict., Art. Turtle-Dove.*)

II. The church of God is exposed to enemies.

III. The church of God can suffer no real harm unless God should deliver her to her enemies.

IV. The church of God is dear to Him, therefore He will not abandon her. "*Thy turtle-dove.*"

HINTS FOR A MISSIONARY SERMON.

(Verse 20.)

I. The state of the heathen world.

1. *Darkness.* Not without the light of nature, reason, or conscience ; but without the light of revelation. 2. *Cruelty.* Missionary records, and the narratives of explorers afford sadly numerous and painful illustrations of this.

II. The covenant of God in relation to the heathen world. That the heathen are included in it is manifest from

both prophecies and promises of the Word (Ps. ii. 8, lxxii. 8-17 ; Isa. xi. 9, *et al.*)

III. The duty of the church in relation to the heathen world. 1. *To plead God's covenant on its behalf.* 2. *To carry out the command of God for the fulfilment of the covenant.* "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

PSALM LXXV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician, *Altaschith*:" see introduction to Psalm lvii. "*A Psalm—a song of Asaph*:" see introduction to Psalm lxxiv.

"There are," says Perowne, "no clearly marked historical allusions in the Psalm. It seems, however, not improbable, as has been conjectured by many commentators, that it may refer to the time of the Assyrian invasion, either as celebrating, or immediately anticipating the defeat of Sennacherib. Like Ps. xlv., it bears some resemblance to the prophecies of Isaiah uttered at that time." It seems to us that in this Psalm we have the "thank-prayer" of the people in confident anticipation of victory over the Assyrians ; and, in the following Psalm, we have their exultant and grateful praise for the accomplishment of that victory.

ISRAEL'S PRAISE FOR THE PROMISED HELP OF GOD.

(Verses 1-3.)

In the first verse, the Psalmist speaks as the mouth-piece of the people of Israel ; in the second and third verses, he represents Jehovah as addressing them. In these verses we have—

I. Heroic anticipation of victory. The people are threatened by Sennacherib. His army is near them even while they chant this prayer-psalm. Yet they are confident of ultimate victory

Around them all was darkness, and to the carnal eye no helper was near, but to the faith-enlightened eye all around them was luminous with the near presence and help of God. They seem to have attained this brave anticipation of victory somewhat in this way.

1. *By contemplating the wondrous works of God.* In former times He had done great and wondrous things for them. He had repeatedly caused their foes to flee before them, utterly discomfited, in battle. He had done wondrous things in nature on their behalf. And now in the day of their distress the great things which He had done for them pass before them clearly and impressively, and their troubled hearts grow calm and strong.

2. *By connecting the wondrous works which He had done for them with promises of wondrous works which He would yet do for them.* He had made to them declarations of the stability of the throne of His servant David. He had promised them victory over their foes. Wondrous things He had said He would do for them. They received and interpreted His promises in the light of His former doings for them, and their hearts grew calm and strong, and buoyant with hope.

3. *By regarding these wondrous works as signs of the Divine presence.* As the threatened Jews contemplated God's wondrous works, they appear to have felt Him near to them, and, thus realising His presence, they confidently anticipated their release from danger, and their restoration to peace and security. Mark the strength of their assurance. The Assyrians have come against them into their own land; there are no outward and visible signs of deliverance, yet so confident are they of the help of God that they pour out their hearts in this thanksgiving Psalm. Their anticipation was so vivid and eager as to make their deliverance appear to them almost an accomplished thing. It reminds us of our Lord's sublime assurance of victory as He entered into the darkness and anguish of His last and fiercest strife. He has forewarned His disciples of the trials and persecutions which await them. And

now He would encourage them, and He says, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." There is much of temptation and grief and terrible battling immediately awaiting Him, yet He regards the victory as so infallibly sure that it seems His already. The faith is grand, heroic, which so trusts God's promise as to anticipate the victory, as the poet does in this Psalm.

II. *Firm ground of confidence.* In the second and third verses we understand the poet as representing God as the speaker. The translation of the second verse given in the margin, appears to give the correct idea, "When I shall take a set time I will judge uprightly;" or, "For I shall fix a time when I shall judge righteously." Upon the promise of God to interpose for them, they base their faith and hope as upon a sure foundation.

1. *In times of the greatest distress He is all-sufficient.* Such a time is indicated in the third verse. "The earth, in consequence of the success of the conqueror of the world, is, as it were, dissolved, sunk back into its ancient chaotic state; but the same omnipotence which at that time brought its dissolution to an end, shall aid it now." In the greatest calamities, such as a dissolution of the earth, God is calm and unmoved in His own conscious sufficiency and sovereignty. When the earth seems to be reeling into ruin He calms His people with the assurance, "I have adjusted the pillars of it;" and they know that they are secure. Can we conceive any distress which He is unable to cope with and overcome? Is it possible that any evil or misery can be so complicated as to baffle infinite wisdom? Can there be a calamity so appalling and utter as to triumphantly defy omnipotence to remove or relieve it?

2. *When He interposes He will judge righteously.* He will manifest no unfair partiality or favouritism. He sitteth upon the throne judging in righteousness. This was an encouragement to His menaced and imperilled people. They

thought upon it, and lifted up their heads, believing that their redemption drew nigh. Let the oppressed people of God take heart at the remembrance of His upright government. The Lord reigneth to smite down the oppressor and vindicate the oppressed. He will deliver the righteous out of all their troubles, and bring them out into a wealthy place. Let the enemies of God take warning. God is supreme. He is also righteous. You are opposing omnipotence, and must be crushed unless you desist from your insane conduct. "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke, and a great ransom cannot deliver thee."

3. *He will interpose in due season.* "When I shall take a set time I will judge uprightly." "Our God, who governs the world by His omnipotence and wisdom, has appointed to all things a boundary, and has also fixed a time and an hour for His judgment, and when this comes, He reveals His judgments, and no man can hinder them. God withholds His punishments for a very long time, but at last it comes with certainty, and makes no delay." Let the much-tried child of God learn to wait patiently and hopefully for His appearing. In infinite wisdom and love He has fixed the time when the night of your mourning shall be ended by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings. He will not come a moment too soon. He will not tarry one moment after the due season. At the best time He will come and judge uprightly.

Surely there is here the firmest ground for the strong confidence which the Psalmist expresses for the people. God is more than sufficient even to their great needs, when He interposes He will judge righteously, and He will interpose in due season.

III. *Devout utterance of praise.* "Unto Thee, O God, do we give thanks,

do we give thanks." The thanksgiving of the people was hearty. The Psalm opens with praise, and before it closes it breaks forth into praise again. The praise was emphasised, repeated—"We give thanks, we give thanks." Praise such as this, for a promised blessing, in a special manner honours God by the calm, strong trust in His word which it implies. It rises as an acceptable offering unto Him. Such praise as this also blesses those who offer it. It is indeed a means of grace unto them. By means of it their faith is yet more increased. Their soul is calmed, enriched, and exalted into communion with God.

"When gratitude o'erflows the swelling heart,
And breathes in free and uncorrupted praise
For benefits received: propitious Heaven
Takes such acknowledgment as fragrant
incense,
And doubles all its blessings."

—George Lillo.

CONCLUSION.—1. *In times of the greatest calamity let us trust in the Lord, and not be afraid.* He has adjusted the pillars of the earth. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear," &c.

2. *Let us learn to recognise God in His works, both in nature and in grace.* Let us pray that our eyes may be opened to see Him, and our ears to catch the inspiring accents of His voice.

3. *Let us cultivate a grateful spirit.* "Nothing more detestable," said Ausonius, "does the earth produce than an ungrateful man."

"I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice, whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood."—Shakespeare.

Gratitude is well pleasing to God. It also enriches man. The ungrateful man has his blessings in his hand only; the grateful man has them in his heart and hand. He is thus "twice blessed." Let our gratitude rise to God in psalms of praise, and express itself amongst men in kindly deeds.

GOD'S NEARNESS TO HIS PEOPLE A REASON FOR PRAISING HIM.

(Verse 1.)

I. *There are times when God specially manifests Himself to His people.*

"Thy name" = Thyself. God's wondrous works led the Psalmist to feel that God

Himself was near. God specially manifests Himself to His people—

1. *In deliverances wrought for them.* Cite examples.

2. *In judgments inflicted upon them.* Cite examples. It is our shame that we sometimes fail to see God in the blessings which He bestows upon us. He must needs visit us in judgment ere we feel Him near.

3. *In revivals of His work.* What quickening of spiritual life! What increase of spiritual activities! What gracious conversions! What restorations of backsliders!

"Thy noblest wonders here we view,
In souls renewed and sins forgiven."

God is near to many *objectively*, yet not *subjectively*. He is near to them, yet they do not feel Him near. Let His wondrous works in nature, in providence, and in the human soul be to us a sign, an indication, of His own presence.

II. These manifestations should awaken the praise of His people.

"Unto Thee, O God, do we give thanks, do we give," &c. Our thanksgiving, like that of the people in this Psalm, should be,—1. *Repeated*. "We give thanks, we give thanks." "Stinted gratitude is ingratitude. For infinite goodness there should be measureless thanks." 2. *Heartily*. God accepts our praise only as it proceeds from the heart. 3. *Practical*. The people by the poet express their resolve to oppose evil, and favour righteousness. We should praise God "not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to His service and by walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all our days."

Let us cultivate fervent gratitude to God. Gratitude is the *duty* of every one. Let us esteem it a *privilege*. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" &c. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," &c. "While I live will I praise the Lord," &c.

"We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come."

ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

(Verses 4-8.)

In these verses the Poet speaks as the mouth-piece of the people. "According to some expositors, the address of God is still continued in this verse; according to others in verse fifth; and according to others even in verse sixth. But verse seventh, where God is spoken of in the third person, hangs together with verse sixth by 'for,' and this verse again with verse five by 'for,' and verses four and five cannot be disjoined from each other." Moreover, "the *Selah* stands at the end of the preceding verse, and the expression, 'I say,' at the beginning of this one, indicates a change of speaker."—Hengstenberg.

The Divine government is here regarded—

I. As a rebuke to wicked oppressors.

1. *The wicked are admonished of the folly of sin.* "I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly." Sin is folly, and he who acts wickedly "deals foolishly." Sin is irrational. All sound reasoning is opposed to moral evil. Conscience

condemns it as wrong. Reason pronounces it to be folly. The laws of God in nature all antagonise it. The law of God as revealed in His Word exhibits it as moral insanity. Sin is self-injury. The evil-doer is working his own ruin; he is destroying himself. In this world he is foregoing the most exquisite and exalting joys for the unsatisfying pleasures of sin. In the world to come there is for him "a fearful looking for." "He that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." Sinner, "Do thyself no harm," . . . "deal not foolishly."

2. *The proud are counselled to shun insolence.* "I said unto the wicked, Lift not up the horn. Lift not up," &c. The horn was a symbol of power. And the foes of Israel are here exhorted not to boast insolently of their power. Pride of power is a most absurd thing. In some respects, how insignificant is the greatest of men! how weak the most powerful of men! God is supreme. With what infinite ease can He baffle

the most cunningly devised schemes of man! And the strength of the mightiest is utter weakness before Him.

Haughtiness and arrogance ill-become any creature. To boast of power is a sure sign of weakness, and usually heralds a great fall. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." It was pride that led to the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven. Pride ruined King Saul. Pride brought Haman to the gallows. Pride, "lifting up of the horn, and speaking with a stiff neck," brought Nebuchadnezzar from his throne, expelled him from his palace, drove him from human society, and sent him to herd with the beasts of the field. The fact of the supremacy of the Divine government should silence all proud boasters.

II. As an encouragement to the righteous. "For lifting up," *i.e.*, deliverance from trouble, safety, victory, "cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south," &c.

1. *There are times of need when all human aids are unavailing.* Israel was experiencing such a time. They looked eastward, westward, southward, and could see no signs of deliverance. From the north their adversary approached. There was no help for them in man. If they must look to an arm of flesh for support, then their case seems hopeless. Reliance upon any human assistance is utterly vain. Their case is too extreme to be met by any efforts of their own, or by any alliances which they might form.

Their case is surely a picture of what sometimes happens to the good man. From one quarter the trouble comes, and from all other quarters of the earth no help can reach him. The experience of each man will afford examples of such times—times when human helpers all fail, when human resources are utterly inadequate to our need, when we look around us for encouragement or hope, but look in vain. May it not be that such seasons of helplessness, and extreme need, and human inability are of Divine arrangement? They certainly have the divinest uses. They tend to teach us our own helplessness, and the vanity of

all human beings as objects of trust, and to lead us to place our hope in God.

2. *At such times consideration of the Divine government inspires the soul to hope in God.* "God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another." He ordereth human affairs. "Kingdoms shift about like clouds, obedient to His breath." And He is ever on the side of truth and righteousness. So the threatened people of Israel turned confidently to Him when all other helpers failed, and all other resources were inadequate to their need. He could put down their foes, as He had done in past times. He could lift them up into safety and triumph. He could defend their cause, and carry it to glorious victory. And, therefore, they lifted up their hearts and voices in glad thanksgivings to Him. He is ever the hope of His people. He "turneth the shadow of death into the morning." In our extremity, when our strength is all spent, and "the collied night" surrounds us, and the storm is loud and strong, and progress is impossible to us, He cometh to us walking on the boisterous and threatening waves, hushes the thunderous clamours into peace, quells our craven fears, and brings us to the desired haven. Courage, servant of God! "The Lord reigneth."

III As an assurance of the punishment of the wicked. "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red, it is full of mixture," &c.

1. *The punishment of the wicked is from God.* The cup is in His hand. There is a grave tendency in our time to a dangerous sentimentalism which represents God as pitiful, compassionate, and forgiving, and ignores His holiness and justice. God is merciful; He is also righteous. He pardons the penitent; He also punishes the persistently impenitent. There is wrath in God—not a stormy, passionate, revengeful feeling, as it too often is in man; but a calm, holy, fixed determination to punish those who scorn His reproofs, trample under foot His laws, and reject His salvation. God must wage incessant war against evil. His love burns with unquenchable fire against sin. His laws

are all arrayed against it in stern antagonism. Wisely and benevolently He has so ordered His universe that penalty shall ever follow transgression. And if men persist in iniquity, then iniquity will be their ruin.

2. *The punishment of the wicked is severe.* The cup is "full of mixture," an allusion to the custom of mixing roots and spices with the wine to increase its intoxicating power. What a cup is that which is being prepared for the wicked! What blighted hopes, what lost opportunities, what ever-accusing memories, what bitter self-reproaches, what unutterable anguish! Oh! the unfathomable depths of misery involved in the words—"Hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." They shall drain this cup to the very "dregs." The bitter draught cannot be evaded. No part of it may be left undrank. There is no escape from the misery; for the misery is within the guilty breast.

"Me miserable! which way shall I flee?
Where'er I am is hell; myself am hell!"

3. *The punishment of the wicked is without exception.* "All the wicked." "There is no respect of persons with God." He is just in His dealings with

all men. Favouritism or partiality is unknown to Him. The finally impenitent, the irreclaimably wicked, of all lands and of all ages, "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." "God will render to every man according to his deeds: . . . unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Warning to the wicked.* "If man will contend with God, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?" 2. *Counsel to the wicked.* "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." 3. *Admonition to those in high stations.* Realise your dependence. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." 4. *Encouragement for the oppressed righteous.* "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me."

A MODEL OF DEVOUT PRAISE.

(Verses 9, 10.)

The Poet still speaks as the mouth-piece of all the people of Israel. And, feeling confident of deliverance, declares their resolution to praise God for ever, to suppress the wicked, and to exalt the righteous. The praise resolved upon here is worthy of our imitation, inasmuch as it—

I. Loses sight of self in devout admiration of the character and doings of God.

1. *He will praise God for His doings.* He resolves to declare for ever the wondrous works of God. God had done great things for them, they were confident that He would again do great things for them, and were determined to "praise the Lord, declare His doings among the people, and make mention

that His name is exalted." God has done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Shall not we praise Him for His mighty acts? "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." "He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay," &c. Considering what God has done for us, especially in giving to us Christ and His salvation, if we were not to praise Him, surely the very stones would cry out. The great things He has done for us were (1) *Undeserved by us.* "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (2) *Unsought by us.* We did not seek God, but He sought us by Jesus Christ. (3) *Freely and heartily given by God*

out of His own sovereign love. "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

2. *He will praise God for His faithfulness.* "I will sing praises to the God of Jacob." God had entered into covenant with Jacob, and that covenant He had kept. Through all the vicissitudes of their history, from the time of their father Jacob until the time when this Psalm was sung, God had never abandoned them. They had had their seasons of darkness and trial, but the Lord was their Friend and God in those seasons, though they saw Him not. They praise the God of their fathers, for His faithfulness. "For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance." We, too, have found Him a covenant-keeping God. We have proved that His promises are reliable, that He ever abideth faithful. With Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Shall we not praise Him as we recollect that we have never trusted Him in vain? and that He is the unfailing rock of our heart?

3. *He will praise God "for ever."* Not simply while His gracious interpositions are recent, but *for ever*. Constant mercies should awaken constant gratitude, and constant gratitude will seek to express itself constantly in some form of praise. In some of the old monasteries it was a rule that the chanting of praise should never be interrupted, and that one choir of monks should relieve another in the sacred service. Let us learn a lesson from this. "Let not thy praises be transient—a fit of music, and then the instrument hung by the wall till another gaudy day of some remarkable providence makes thee take it down. God comes not guest-wise to His saints' house, but to dwell with them. David took this up for a life-work: 'As long as I live, I will praise Thee.'"

II. *Evinces its reality by resolving to imitate Him.* Anticipating their "lifting up" the people resolve, through the grace of God and in the strength

which He grants them, to cut off all the horns of the wicked, and to exalt the horns of the righteous. When they were restored to peace and security they would use their power in putting down wickedness, and upholding and honouring the righteous. These are the very things which, by anticipation, they have beheld God doing, and in this Psalm have praised Him for doing. They resolve that they will imitate Him in these things. It has been well said that, "Imitation is the sincerest praise." This praise they here offer to God. Do we know by personal experience this praise? Our praise of the excellences of others is a very hollow affair unless we also cultivate those excellences. We praise God for His "unspeakable Gift;" are we imitating His pure generosity? We praise Jesus Christ for His great self-sacrifice for us; are we denying ourselves in His spirit that others might be benefited? We bless God for the Gospel; are we exemplifying the spirit of the Gospel? A certain Dr. Whitaker, on reading the fifth chapter of Matthew, brake out, saying, "Either this is not the Gospel, or we are not of the Gospel." And is it not to be feared that the spirit of the Gospel for which men praise God, and the spirit of their lives, are often widely different? Let us evince the sincerity of our praise to God by imitating Him in our spirit and life. Let us admire Him, commune with Him, adore Him, until we are transformed into the same image. Let us, like the Psalmist, cultivate such thoroughness and fervency of praise that we shall lose sight of everything but God and His glory. May God so fill the horizon of the soul that we may be filled with admiration and praise of Him.

"God! God! God!
Thou fill'st our eyes
As were the skies
One burning, boundless sun;
While creature mind,
In path confined,
Passeth a spot thereon.
God! God! God!"—*P. J. Bailey.*

PSALM LXXVI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician on Neginoth." See Introduction to Psalm liv.

A Psalm—a Song of Asaph. (See notes on the authorship of Psalm lxxiv.) The superscription may be thus paraphrased—A Psalm, a Song of Asaph, to be delivered to the director of music, that he may arrange for its performance with the accompaniment of stringed instruments.

Occasion.—There appear to us very good reasons for regarding the Psalm as a celebration of Israel's victory over the Assyrians. The preceding Psalm sang the heroic anticipation of triumph, this one the exultant realisation of triumph.

GOD THE CHAMPION OF THE GOOD.

The victorious army of Sennacherib is encamped before Jerusalem threatening to besiege it unless Hezekiah will submit to them, and admit them into the city. The invading army was very numerous and powerful, and was emboldened by many and signal victories. In his extremity Hezekiah is strengthened by the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, and he refuses to surrender to the generals of Sennacherib. Isaiah declared, that "the virgin, the daughter of Zion, despised and laughed to scorn" the invaders. According to His promise, God interposed on behalf of His people, "and on the first night of the siege, a hundred fourscore and five thousand, with their captains and generals, were destroyed." (*Vide* 2 Chron. xxxii.; Isa. xxxvii.; Josephus Antiq. x. 1.)

We may profitably regard this chapter of ancient history as an illustration of *God's Championship of His people*. It is common to speak of human life upon earth as a battle. To every man who is in any degree acquainted with the meaning and importance of life there are difficulties and struggles to be encountered. There is disorder to be attacked, subdued, made orderly and rhythmic. There are ignorance, stupidity, brutality, to be encountered and vanquished by intelligence, wisdom, and manliness. The truly good man, he who, in the strength of God, is trying to live holily, usefully, and bravely, especially finds life a battle. To him there are not only the manifest enemies of ignorance, vice, and crime, but subtle,

spiritual foes within him and around him. His own soul is beleaguered by enemies. The cause of God in the world, too, is attacked by foes, as was Jerusalem by the Assyrian hosts. We are inadequate to contend with forces so numerous and powerful. Yet "there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles."

I. The enemies of the good are many and mighty. The Assyrian army was vast and powerful, and had been very victorious. The Psalmist speaks of them as "the stout-hearted," . . . "the men of might." They illustrate the enemies of the people of God. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God," &c. (Eph. vi. 10-13). Good men have to contend with *Satan*. He is the great leader of the antagonism against God and goodness. He strives for his own diabolical mastery, for the sovereignty of darkness and evil. In our day the great adversary of God and man seeks to compass his diabolic ends not so much by force as by fraud. The time was when the good had to dread the "roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour." At present, he is far more dangerous when he "is transformed into an angel of light." He works with a shrewd cunning, a subtle diplomacy, and by means of politic disguises. He can assume the self-possession of a man of the world, or the manners of a gentleman. He can speak the language of

accomplished scholarship, or of deep and patient thought. Or, he can assume the garb of religion, and speak the language of piety. Indirectly and by means of artful disguises he seeks to accomplish his fiendish purpose, the utter depravation and ruin of souls. In all scenes and at all times he steadily works to accomplish his object. By many and varied means he is suggesting evil to the soul, and stimulating and impelling the soul under false pretences to follow that evil. A man is lured to drunkenness under the pretence of sociality and good companionship. Another is snared into the most miserable avarice under the guise of making provision for future emergencies, or of practising a proper economy. In this indirectness and subtlety of method lie the great strength of the devil; and by reason of these his attacks are fraught with great peril to men. Moreover, in his great warfare against the good, *Satan has many allies*. From the revelations of the Bible, it is clear to us that there are many angelic helpers of the good, and that there are many fallen angels who, under their great leader, oppose the good. There are ranks and orders of these fallen angels—"principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual hosts of wickedness."

These beings exert much influence in suggesting evil to the mind and heart, and in impelling the mind and heart to evil. He is but a shallow thinker that ridicules the idea of malign spiritual influences acting upon us; and has studied with but little effect either the experiences of his own heart or the phenomena of mind in general. Assuredly

"There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in his philosophy."

Satan has allies also in human society. The good have to contend against "*the world*" as well as against the devil, or against the devil as he works by human agency. There are men of splendid but impure imagination who are corrupting souls by sensuous literature. There are others of education and mental power who are producing works which tend to unsettle men's faith not only in human

creeds, but in Divine revelation, and even in the reality of truth, and righteousness, and love. Music, and many of the so-called refinements and arts of life are, to a great extent, made to minister to the senses rather than to the soul, to the appetites rather than to the aspirations of man's nature. And the souls of many seem steeped in worldliness. At the shrine of Mammon immense multitudes are ever bowing. Men are sacrificing all mental culture and progress for gold, sacrificing principle for gold, sometimes sacrificing their soul for gold. Parents are willing to immolate their children upon the altar of Mammon, and sacrifice their daughters for gold. It is not without reason that we pray for deliverance from the snares and seductions of "*the world*;" for they are full of peril, and they beset all classes and conditions of men. The good have also to contend against *enemies within themselves*. There are tendencies to evil in our own nature. The completeness of our moral power is broken. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit." Passion is frequently arrayed against principle. Inclination and conscience are often at variance. "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." There is that in us which responds to temptation, and gives to temptation its power; that in us which is attracted by evil in certain of its forms as steel is drawn by the magnet. Thus some of the severest struggles are fought in the arena of human souls. Here, then, are the enemies against which we have to battle, "*the world, the flesh, and the devil*;" evil within us, and evil around us; ignorance, superstition, oppression, bigotry, unbelief, vice, crime, pain, disease, misery, and death. "O our God, we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee."

II. The Champion of the good is greater than all their enemies. The Psalmist represents God as completely vanquishing the foes of Israel. In one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army were slain. "When God arose to judgment to

save" His people, the enemy was speedily and utterly discomfited.

1. *He issues forth to battle from Zion.* Zion is represented as the dwelling-place of God. "In Judah is God known: His name is great in Israel: in Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion." "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." Sennacherib had virtually challenged Jehovah to combat. He sent to the Jews, saying, "No god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers; how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?" The contest was "between the gods as well as the military forces of the two kingdoms." The presumptuous monarch begins to besiege the holy city. He will capture the very dwelling-place of the Lord God of Sabaoth. God accepts the challenge, and in the silence of the night He calmly goes forth, and with the breath of His nostrils He slays His foes. "The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands." And the proud boaster hastily retreats, to meet with a speedy and ignominious death. Not in any local Zion does God now manifest His glory. Jesus Christ is the true Shekinah, "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." God goes forth in Him to combat His foes. The great controversies of Christendom are concerning Him. The opposition to religion is to a great extent directed against Him. His spirit and principles, His authority to legislate for human society, His right to reign over men, His claim of Godhood, these are combated by men to-day. All the opposition to which His disciples are subjected He regards as directed against Himself. Their foes He holds to be His foes. He is the great antagonist of all evil. By His Spirit and His Church He wages war against sin, suffering, and death. In proportion as His people are animated by His Spirit and live in His life are they victorious

in conflict. God in Christ shall conquer all our foes. The sublime wisdom of His teaching, the Divine beauty of His life, the heart-moving, Godlike power of His death shall subdue the world unto Him. "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," &c.

2. *He issues forth to complete victory.* When God entered the lists the vast and valiant hosts of Sennacherib were swept into the silent sleep of death in a moment. "There brake He the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle," &c.

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,

That host with their banners at sunset were seen:

Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,

That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown."

God not only got to Himself a complete victory, but His glory was increased amongst His people and amongst the heathen by reason of the wrath of His enemies. He made the wrath of man to praise Him. The proud boasting of Sennacherib and the attack of his mighty hosts called forth a conspicuous display of the power and majesty of God. His people saw it, and celebrated His praises. The heathen saw it, and "brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah, king of Judah: so that He was magnified in the sight of all nations." Thus the Lord got Him honour upon Sennacherib. This is an illustration of the victory which He will achieve over all His foes. There are times when we stand dismayed before our enemies. The evils of our own hearts are more than a match for us. And, when we think of the foes that are in the world, and of the vast influence of the great leader of the evil forces, we feel how utterly inadequate we are to cope with such tremendous powers. But the Captain of our salvation is more than sufficient for us. He will turn the counsel of the enemies of His people to their own confusion. He will give us the victory over our foes. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under thy feet shortly." "We are more than conquerors through Him that hath

loved us." He will enable us to draw from our conflicts a strength and courage, a hatred of evil, and an enthusiasm for goodness which we could not otherwise have obtained. He will continue the conflict until He is victorious over every foe. He will even overrule the dark and malicious designs and workings of Satan and his allies for the promotion of His glory. After all the devil is but the vassal of the Lord our God. Unwittingly he is being used to promote the enthronement of the true and good. "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

3. *He achieves complete victory with the utmost ease.* Whatever the "angel," messenger, which the Lord sent against the Assyrian host was, it is clear that the victory was achieved with the utmost ease. "Who can stand in Thy sight when once Thou art angry?"

"For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,

And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ;

And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,

And their hearts but once heav'd, and for ever grew still."

God rebukes His foes, and they are vanquished. So in the end He will subdue His foes with the most consummate ease. The foes of the good exist and are active, not because He is unable to subdue them, but because for wise and benevolent purposes He sees fit to allow them to resist Him and oppose His cause. But when He arises to judgment they will "melt like snow in His glance." Wherefore let the people of God take courage and exult in their Champion.

III. *The Champion of the good should be duly honoured.*

1. *His people should pay their vows to Him.* "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God all ye who are round about Him." The latter clause makes it clear that this refers to His people. The twelve tribes used to pitch round about the tabernacle. And Jehovah was said to dwell in the midst of them. The vows which they had made to Him in the time of their danger and fear, they are exhorted to pay to Him now

that deliverance has been wrought for them. In the conflicts of life men frequently vow that if deliverance from trouble, or extrication from difficulty, or victory over enemies be granted to them, they will consecrate themselves or their possessions more fully to God. But these vows are frequently forgotten when the peril is past. Thy vows are registered in heaven by the faithful God. Pay them. With shameful ingratitude thou hast far too long left them unpaid, pay them at once.

2. *Offerings of devotion should be made to Him.* "Bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared." After the defeat of Sennacherib "many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem," and "He was magnified in the sight of all nations." God is worthy to receive the homage of all peoples. The day is coming when men shall esteem it a high privilege and pleasure to bring their richest treasures as an offering to Him.

Let us bring presents to Him who fighteth for us in all our battles. Man of wealth, dedicate thy possessions to Him. Man of genius, lay thy genius on the altar of Divine consecration. Let us each give to Him of our best and richest treasures.

3. *The glory of victory should be ascribed to Him alone.* In the case of the Assyrian hosts He alone encountered and vanquished them. "O sing unto the Lord a new song ; for He hath done marvellous things : His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory." And the praise and honour were all ascribed to Him. In all the victories of His people He is the real Conqueror. If we come out of temptation victorious, it is because of the help of His grace. If in any measure we have been successful in our conflict with ignorance and sin and misery, we have been so by the power of His might. "Blessed be the Lord my rock, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight."

"He makes the glorious victory mine,
And His shall be the praise."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the Church of God remember its obligation.* "Be

strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," &c. (Eph. vi. 10-18).

2. *Let the Church of God remember*

its Champion. "Through God we shall do valiantly; for He shall tread down our enemies."

GOD THE SAVIOUR OF THE MEEK.

(Verse 9.)

Consider—

I. The character of the people of God. "The meek." "A pious, patient one."—*Fuerst's Lex.*

1. *Meekness is not mere easiness of disposition, or apathy.* Absence of sensibility, whether physical, mental, or moral, is neither virtuous nor blessed.

2. *Meekness is not cowardice or weakness.* The truly meek man is as brave as he is calm, as courageous as he is patient.

3. *Meekness has a God-ward and a man-ward aspect.* (1) *Its attitude towards God is that of cheerful acquiescence in the appointments of His will and the arrangements of His providence.* It does not criticise, or complain, or murmur because of His doings, but is humble and quiet before Him. (2) *Towards man, meekness manifests itself in pa-*

tiently bearing with the defects and weaknesses of others, in willingness to endure insult and injury rather than do wrong, and in charitably adopting the most favourable construction on the action or course of conduct of any one, when two constructions are admissible. Meekness is "not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good."

II. The peril of the people of God. They need some one "to save" them. 1. *They have enemies.* 2. *These enemies are many and strong.* 3. *They are inadequate to cope with these enemies.*

III. The Deliverer of the people of God. God is their vindicator and Saviour. 1. *He punishes the proud oppressor.* 2. *He saves the oppressed meek.* "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord."

GOD GLORIFIED THROUGH MAN'S WRATH.

(Verse 10.)

Our text gives a special aspect of Divine Providence. Amid the confusion and suffering and sin of the present God reigns, so that the issue is His highest glory. The world has not been deserted by its Maker, although the mode of His continuous presence and working is inexplicable. But how wonderful that man's freedom and responsibility should be inviolate, while his resistance is overcome, the fierce and swelling tide of his passions controlled, and the character of God illustrated and glorified. God's spiritual Providence is an organ for bringing forth the largest possible amount of happiness and good, and for filling the universe with pure and lasting glory. From the first the world has been afflicted with sufferings and tumults, and the crimes which war against private and public good. There

are times of social and political earthquake, when the abyss opens at our feet. But for the Divine Providence these phenomena must have been more distressing and terrific. Through God's continuous and universal presence and acting, the misery springing from the sin and crime of men is immeasurably lessened. With this conviction, we gratefully say, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee," &c.

I. The wrath of man not unfrequently defeats its own aims and accomplishes the Divine purpose. The cruel envy of Joseph's brothers, Pharaoh's crafty policy of imposing heavier and more grievous burdens on the Israelites, Haman's ambition and his enmity against Mordecai, illustrate this. Opposite and conflicting interests, as it seems to us, are so balanced, violence is

so checked, "vaulting ambition" so "overleaps itself," that man's wrath brings into greater clearness and glory the Divine power and wisdom and goodness.

II. The wrath of man is sometimes the instrument of the Divine will. Generally our sins become our scourge. Our "own wickedness corrects" us, &c. But specially. The sole object of the Babylonian monarch was the gratification of his ambition by conquest and spoil, yet he was "the rod" of God (Isa. x. 5-7). This is frequently exemplified in the conduct of the first Napoleon—in our Chinese wars, indefensible, yet introducing the Gospel—in the Russian war, so unnecessary and so barren in anticipated results, yet abolishing serfdom, and preparing for the emancipation of religion from a bigotry as narrow and fierce as that of Rome—in the Indian Mutiny, which roused the Church to acknowledge India's claim on her prayers and efforts—in the terrible conflict that raged in America, issuing in the freedom of the slave, and, despite appearances, in a higher and purer public opinion and morality—in the recent Franco-German war, tending to widen civil and religious liberty, as it limits and weakens the priestly power, everywhere and always the enemy of popular rights and of a free Gospel. With no fear of God, in the simple pursuit of their own ends, men are the instruments of the Divine Providence.

III. Man in his wrath accomplishes the Divine will when setting himself to resist and frustrate it. The design of God is fulfilled by direct attempts to defeat it (Acts iv. 27 and 28, with iv.

10 and 11.) Persecution defeats itself. "Noble lives crowned by heroic deaths" are the best arguments and defences of any church. The assaults of infidelity result in the more triumphant vindication of the faith. Hume prophesied that Christianity could not survive the nineteenth century. Voltaire impiously said that one wise man would undo what twelve fools had accomplished. Julian will exterminate the faith; but he and all exclaim—"O Galilean! Thou hast conquered." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee."

God rules in wisdom, righteousness, and love. The end of His rule, the triumph of purity and truth. The way to the end is not traceable by us; but the *fact*, the *end* is sure.

Courage, then. We are not the sport of fortune. It is not a great drama of chance which is now acted. A hand unseen is turning all to a great end, and blessed as great—the glory of God in the triumph of truth and holiness and love, and thus the complete and everlasting blessedness of man.

For *God is not a despot*, careless at what cost His purposes are realised, if only He triumph. He *is* a wise and beneficent *Ruler*; or rather a holy and wise and loving *Father*, employing His resources for the good of all His children, patient though they are rebellious and foolish, and only at last, if at last, banishing from the home they have forsaken and despised the obstinately perverse. Because God is so wise and holy and gracious, and withal so mighty, how hazardous to resist His will or despise His grace!—W. Y., B. A.

VOWS MADE IN TROUBLE.

(Verse 11.)

"Vow and pay unto the Lord your God, all ye who are round about Him." "*Round about Him.*" A description of His people, as the twelve tribes pitched round about the tabernacle, and the four and twenty elders were round about God's throne."—*Ainsworth*.

I. The great tendency of man to
426

make religious vows in times of danger and trouble. The Jews did so when the Assyrians were before Jerusalem. Men are very prone to do so.

1. *This is sometimes evil*, because it indicates a disposition to bargain with God. To vow that we will serve God *on condition* that He will deliver or help

us is wrong. He has an absolute claim upon our possessions and upon ourselves. See the meanness and selfishness of Jacob as manifested in his vow at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 20-22).

2. *This is sometimes good.* When trouble awakens thought, and thought leads to repentance, and the humble spirit vows to honour and serve God, such vows are excellent.

II. The great tendency of man to forget these vows when the trouble and danger are past. This is proverbial—

“When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;

When the devil was well, the devil a monk was he.”

“Thus we say, *The river past, and God forgotten*, to express with how mournful a frequency He whose assistance was

invoked, it may have been earnestly, in the moment of peril, is remembered no more, so soon as by His help the danger has been surmounted.”—*Archbishop Trench.*

1. *Vows begotten of fear* are not likely to be kept when the cause of fear is removed. 2. *Vows begotten of penitence or gratitude* will be piously remembered and fulfilled.

III. The great sin of forgetting or failing to fulfil these vows. 1. *There is ingratitude.* Having received the benefit we ignore our obligation to the Benefactor. 2. *There is unfaithfulness.* Having promised we fail to perform that which we have promised. We lie unto the faithful God. Brother, thy vows are registered in heaven. Pay them. Pay them fully, heartily, at once.

PSALM LXXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—“*To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, a Psalm of Asaph.*” Jeduthun was one of the leaders of sacred music in David’s time (1 Chron. xvi. 41, 42, 2 Chron. v. 12). One of the twenty-four musical choirs left by David bore the honorary title Jeduthun or Jeduthun, perhaps from him, as its founder (1 Chron. xxv.)

A Psalm of Asaph. See Introduction to Psalm lxxiv.

Occasion.—It is not known, nor have we any means of determining upon what occasion the Psalm was written. But, Perowne has well said concerning it, “Whenever, and by whomsoever, the Psalm may have been written, it clearly is individual, not national. It utterly destroys all the beauty, all the tenderness and depth of feeling in the opening portion, if we suppose that the people are introduced speaking in the first person. The allusions to the national history may indeed show that the season was a season of national distress, and that the sweet singer was himself bowed down by the burden of the time, and oppressed by woes which he had no power to alleviate; but it is his own sorrow, not the sorrow of others, under which he sighs, and of which he has left the pathetic record.” The Psalm is eminently fitted to teach us how we may obtain comfort and peace even in the severest distresses.

Homiletically the Psalm sets before us, First: *The good man’s trouble and Deliverer*, verses 1-3. Second: *The thoughts and inquiries of a godly soul in distress*, verses 4-9. Third: *The godly soul rising superior to trouble by the devout contemplation of the works and ways of God*, verses 10-20.

THE GOOD MAN’S TROUBLE AND DELIVERER.

(Verses 1-3.)

I. The Good man’s trouble. All men have some measure of acquaintance with trouble. It is not given to us to travel through life under unclouded skies, favoured by refreshing breezes, amid enchanting scenery, with delightful companionships, and upon a pleasant and easy road. There are times when

we have to walk in loneliness and sorrow, with weary limbs, and bleeding feet, and aching heart, beneath darkened skies, and amid pelting storms. The good man has no exemption from life’s sorrows and trials. He is exposed to *physical* trials. Bodily pains and diseases visit and try “the true-born child of

God" as well as the wicked. He suffers from *social* trials also. He has disappointments and losses in business, he is pained by the inconstancy and duplicity of those whom he regarded as true, he suffers by reason of the afflictions and sorrows of those who are dear to him, and he is sometimes stricken with anguish by the invasions of death into the home or social circle. He also experiences *religious* trials. His own imperfections and sins are a source of grief to him. The contrast between the ideal and the actual in his own life is great and painful. He has seasons of dark doubt, and sad misgiving, and distressful hiding of the face of God from him. Of such experiences the poet sings in this Psalm. The compassions and favours, the mercies and faithfulnesses of God seemed to be all cut off from him. God himself seemed to have forsaken him, cast him off. The intensity of his trouble is seen in that—

1. *It was continuous.* In the day he sought the Lord by reason of it, and at night his hand was unweariedly outstretched in prayers for deliverance. His grief knew no intermission. His soul obtained no rest either by night or by day.

2. *His soul accepted no consolation,*—"refused to be comforted." Some consolations seemed inadequate to his need. Others seemed too precious for one who was so unworthy in his own sight. And so the wounded heart refused the balm which would have healed it.

3. *The remembrance of God was painful.* We do not wonder that the remembrance of God is painful to the wicked. But that the godly man should find it painful to direct his thoughts to God is indeed strange. Meditation on God should fill the soul of the good man with holiest music. Very sore must have been the trial of the Psalmist when he was troubled at the recollection of God.

4. *Meditation increased grief.* "I meditated and my spirit was overwhelmed." Reflection brought no relief to his soul, but seemed to sink him deeper in the abyss of trouble. A very sad state he was in. He is in deep

waters, the waves and billows go over him, and he is unable to obtain relief or rest.

"All things have rest: why should we toil alone?"

We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan;
Still from one sorrow to another thrown:
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings,
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm."

—Tennyson.

These sore trials of godly men by the grace of God are often the means of richest blessings to the soul. As the darkness of night brings out the glory of the starry heavens, so in affliction and trouble some most precious truths shine forth with the greatest brilliance.

"Thou canst not tell

How rich a dowry sorrow gives the soul,
How firm a faith and eagle-sight of God."

—Alford.

II. The Good man's Deliverer. In his trouble the Psalmist betook himself to the throne of grace, he had recourse to God. When trouble drives us nearer to God it is already a blessing to us.

1. *His application to God involved faith.* (1) *In the accessibility of God.* The Psalmist felt that he could approach unto God, and speak to Him in prayer. Trouble cannot drive us into any region where He is not. From the deepest abyss of distress the moan of suffering, the cry of penitence, or the prayer for help, will reach the ear and touch the heart of God. (2) *In the sufficiency of God to help those who seek unto Him.* The Psalmist would not have cried to God had he not believed in His power to help him. Our God is all-sufficient. There are no sorrows that defy His consolations. There are no wounds which the balm of Gilead cannot heal. (3) *In the goodness of God.* Notwithstanding his declaration that he "remembered God and was troubled," the Psalmist must have believed in God's kindness and willingness to help him, or he would not have carried his burden to His throne. Though He seems to hide His face from us, yet He is ever gracious and kind. His name and nature are love. When trouble thus leads us to draw closer to God, and to cast our

burden upon Him, it has not visited us in vain.

2. *His application to God was persevering and earnest.* "I cried unto God with my voice, unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my hand is stretched out at night unwearied." The repetition of the first verse is emphatic, presenting the idea of earnest and fervent supplication. The "hand stretched out at night unwearied" in prayer, indicates how importunate and persevering were his supplications. Hearty, fervent, importunate prayers are acceptable to God. Cold, heartless, formal prayers He does not regard. Let the Psalmist's example be imitated by troubled hearts.

3. *His application to God did not lead to immediate relief.* He says that God "gave ear unto" him; but he seems to have obtained no immediate respite from his troubles. The Divine answer to our supplications is sometimes the continuance of those very trials or afflictions from which we have prayed to be delivered. The answer to the apostle Paul's prayer was not the removal of the thorn from the flesh quivering with agony, but, "My grace is sufficient for thee." The withholding or delaying of that for which we have so importunately pleaded may be the true and gracious answer to our prayers. The blessing may be delayed that our faith and patience may thereby be in-

creased, and that when it comes to us it may come richer and fuller. Or that for which we have asked may be withheld, because Infinite Wisdom sees that to us it would not be a blessing. Thus it is that the earnest, importunate prayers of good men are not always answered at once, and sometimes are not answered at all by granting the thing desired. Yet they are always helpful to the soul, and bring down blessings into the soul from God.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Learn the sacred uses of trouble.* "These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work," &c. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience," &c.

"The tears we shed are not in vain;
Nor worthless is the heavy strife;
If, like the buried seed of grain,
They rise to renovated life.
It is through tears our spirits grow;
'Tis in the tempest souls expand,
If it but teaches us to go
To Him who holds it in His hand.
Oh, welcome, then, the stormy blast!
Oh, welcome, then, the ocean's roar!
Ye only drive more sure and fast
Our trembling bark to Heaven's bright
shore." —T. C. Upham.

2. *Learn the grand resource in trouble.* "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." *α. He is all-sufficient. β. He is ever available. γ. He is ever gracious.* "From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

PRAYER IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 1, 2.)

We have here—

I. **Something common to all men.** "The day of trouble." "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." With so much of sin in the world sorrow and trouble are inevitable.

II. **A commendable example for all men.** "I cried unto God, . . . I sought the Lord." 1. *Earnestly.* "I cried with my voice, unto God with my voice." 2. *Perseveringly.* "My hand is stretched out at night unwearied." "In the day" and "in the night" he

sought the Lord. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee," &c.

III. **A Divine auditor of all men.** "He gave ear unto me." Into the ear of God the cries of humanity are ever entering. Graciously He attends to the feeblest whisper of His people.

IV. **A great mistake of some men.** "My soul refused to be comforted." Surely the Psalmist erred in this. God has graciously arranged our life and circumstances so that healing may come to

the wounded spirit in many ways. Through the aspects and voices of nature, through the contemplation of His Providence, through His holy Word. To refuse His consolation is, 1. *Ungrateful to Him.* 2. *Injurious to ourselves.*

V. An experience which may hap-

pen to all men. To pray earnestly and importunately without any immediate reply was the lot of the poet, and may be the lot of all men. Let us learn the lessons of such an experience. 1. *Calmly trust Him.* 2. *Perseveringly pray to Him.* 3. *Patiently wait for Him.*

RECOLLECTIONS OF GOD PAINFUL TO THE WICKED.

(Verse 3.)

"I remembered God and was troubled."

Why is the remembrance of God pleasant to some of us and painful to others? Why is it sometimes pleasant, and at other times painful, to the same individual?

I. Briefly state what we mean by remembering God. We certainly mean something more than a transient recollection of the word God, or of any other name by which He is known. By remembering God, the Psalmist meant recollecting those ideas which the term God is used by the inspired writers to signify. An eternal, self-existent, infinitely wise, just, and good Being, &c.

II. Inquire why the recollection of such a being should ever be painful; or, why any of God's creatures should be troubled at the remembrance of Him. There is nothing in the Divine character and government which necessarily renders the remembrance of God productive of painful emotions. The remembrance of God is always delightful to holy angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. The constant presence of God constitutes their heaven. The recollection, also, of His existence, character, and government, is usually, though not always, highly pleasing to all good men. If any are troubled by the remembrance of God, the cause must exist solely in themselves. Nothing but sin can ever render the remembrance of God painful to any of His creatures. If our hearts or consciences condemn us, it is impossible to remember Him without being troubled. It will then be painful to remember that He is our Creator and

Benefactor; for the remembrance will be attended with a consciousness of base ingratitude. Painful to think of Him as Lawgiver; for such thoughts will remind us that we have broken His law. So also as to His holiness, omniscience, omnipresence, power, &c.

Nor is this all. Every sinner loves sin. The only happiness with which he is acquainted, consists in gratifying either the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, or the pride of life. But all these are contrary to the will of God. He forbids the sinner to pursue them; He commands him to deny himself, &c. He threatens all who do not comply with everlasting punishment.

The more clearly the wicked perceive God's character and their own, the more light is thrown into their consciences, the more mercies, privileges, and opportunities they have enjoyed and abused, so much the more they will be troubled by a remembrance of God.

APPLICATION.—1. This subject affords a rule by which we may try ourselves, and which will assist us much in discovering our real characters; for the moral character of every intelligent creature corresponds with his habitual views and feelings respecting God. 2. How wretched is the situation of impenitent sinners; of those, who cannot remember God without being troubled. They cannot enjoy real happiness in this life, for the world cannot afford it, and they dare not look up for it to heaven. How much more wretched must their situation be at death and in eternity! 3. How great are our obligations to God for the gospel of Christ! Were it not for this, the remembrance, and still

more the presence of God, would have occasioned nothing but pure, unmingled wretchedness to any human being. 4. Is sin alone the cause which renders the remembrance of God painful? Then let all who have embraced the terms of

reconciliation offered by the gospel, all who desire to remember God without being troubled, beware of sin. Swear an eternal war with sin; not only swear, but maintain it.—*Edward Payson, D.D.*, abridged.

THE THOUGHTS AND INQUIRIES OF A GODLY SOUL IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 4-9)

In our previous section we had to do with the Psalmist's trouble and his application to God by reason thereof. We have now to do with his mental condition as affected by his troubles.

I. The thoughts of a godly soul in trouble. In the mental exercises of the Psalmist we notice—

1. *Reflection on the past doings of God.* "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient tisme." In his distress the Psalmist considered the former dealings of God with mankind, with a view of obtaining relief from his present troubles and light in his present perplexities. To us it seems that a study of the Divine working in human history is calculated to inspire the student with confidence in God, in the wisdom, righteousness, and goodness of His rule. Yet the Psalmist seems to have obtained no help from his consideration of the ancient doings of God. The state of his own soul spread a black pall over everything.

2. *Recollection of times of trouble in his own life, which were also times of song.* "I call to remembrance my song in the night." In the Bible "*night*" is frequently used figuratively, to represent ignorance, sin, suffering, distress, death. Here it is used as the emblem of distress and trouble. "Where is God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" The poet calls to mind former seasons of affliction and sorrow, in which he realised Divine comforts, and was enabled to sing in the darkness. Yet he seems to find no comfort for his present sorrow. He can discover no star to relieve his present darkness. From the recollection of experiences so precious and helpful as God's mercies to him in former troubles he is unable to

draw any consolation. A godly man's condition is deplorable indeed when such experiences afford no help and hope.

3. *Communion with his own heart.* "I communed with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search." He had recalled past experiences of his own, he had reflected and reasoned upon the work of God in human history, now he will consult his own heart. He has tried to get help by the exercise of his intellect, and has failed to do so, now he will seek help by the exercise of his better feelings. "The secret, silent teachings of the *heart* are often our best and safest guide." The heart is "the centre of the spiritual, thinking, and conceptional life" (*Fuerst's Lex.*); and man can commune with his heart, can contemplate his own spiritual nature and faculties, can examine his own spiritual condition, can speak to his soul and be spoken to by his soul. Thus the poet communes with his own heart. But no help does he receive. The trouble seems to have obtained the complete mastery of his entire nature. Intellect and heart are alike subdued by it. Human history and his own experience are alike darkened by it. The soul which is swayed by grief sees all things shrouded in gloom and sadness. To each of us nature wears the colour of our spirit. This truth is finely expressed in *Hamlet*. "I have of late lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercise: and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no

other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither." In a somewhat similar plight was the Psalmist. Trouble had so completely mastered him that he could find neither comfort, help, nor hope anywhere.

II. The inquiries of a godly soul in trouble.

The Psalmist makes several inquiries, which may be classified thus. He inquires—

1. *As to God's mindfulness of His people.* "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" &c. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" &c. God seemed to have "forgotten to be gracious" in His dealings with His servant, and to have so far overlooked him as to lead to the inquiry, "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" It is a sore aggravation of a believer's trials when the Lord seems to be unmindful of him in his time of need. How severe was the smart of the sisters of Bethany, when several days passed, and their Friend and Lord came not near to them, although they had sent to tell Him of their trouble!

2. *As to God's unchangeableness.* In past times He had been to His people a God of mercy and grace, supporting and defending them. Has He changed in this respect? Is it possible that God can change? The thought is "too painful for" us. What misery and desolation would supervene if God, the supremely Good, could change! were to change, and be other than He is! The Psalmist seems to have tasted of this misery as he urged his pain-inspired inquiries.

3. *As to God's faithfulness.* "Doth His promise fail for evermore?" Shall the promise which was made to, and good for, one generation, fail to the next generation? Is not the word of Jehovah reliable? The troubled soul

seems to find repose nowhere. To him nothing appears firm and true, but sin, labour, and suffering. The shadows presented themselves as the only realities.

These inquiries of the troubled Psalmist reveal the *depth and intensity of his sufferings*. It is extremely painful to doubt one's own salvation; but who shall depict the anguish of doubt as to the truth and faithfulness, the righteousness and goodness of God? These inquiries present a *hopeful symptom of the spiritual condition of the Psalmist*. "It is a wise thing thus to put unbelief through the catechism. Each one of the questions is a dart aimed at the very heart of despair."

III. Let us offer a few **Suggestions to a godly soul in trouble.** In his thoughts and inquiries the troubled poet seems much amazed and bewildered. Certain facts were painfully real to him which sorely tried his faith in God, and in His relation to His people. Good men are often tried in like manner. But let us remember—

1. *That there is something radically abnormal in the present state of human society.* It is not natural that under the government of an almighty, wise, and good Being, there should be so much of suffering, and that sometimes the best of men should be the greatest of sufferers. Suffering is here because sin is here. Find suffering and you find sin, either literally or consequentially. Sin is the unnatural, the abnormal thing. "God made man upright." He is *not* responsible for sin. He is rather the great Antagonist of all evil.

2. *That even godly men need discipline.* An educational process is going forward in this life. This world is a great moral school, man is the learner, and suffering is one of the teachers. In the case of the good man suffering is not punitive, but disciplinary, educational. While there are defect and imperfection in us, we need the discipline of the Divine school.

3. *That suffering is often the occasion of richest blessing.* To a true-hearted man doubt as to any of the great spiritual verities is a painful thing.

But such a man doubt almost (if not quite) always conducts to a calmer faith.

"Time tells his tale by shadows, and by clouds

The wind records its progress, by dark doubts

The spirit swiftening on its heavenward course."—*Bailey*.

Tennyson has described such a doubter.

"He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone."

The Captain of our salvation was made "perfect through suffering." And those of His followers in this world who are most like Him are able to say, "We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience," &c.

"'Glory to God,—to God,' he saith;
'Knowledge by suff'ring entereth,
And life is perfected by death.'"

THE GODLY SOUL RISING SUPERIOR TO TROUBLE BY THE DEVOUT CONTEMPLATION OF THE WORKS AND WAYS OF GOD.

(Verses 10-20.)

The mind and heart of the poet are growing calm. His agitation and distress are yielding to the exercise of reason and the power of faith. He is able to reflect to some purpose now.

I. The troubled soul's consideration of the works and ways of God. "I will remember the works of the Lord," &c.

1. *Recollection of the works and ways of God.* How wonderful is the faculty of memory! How great is its *conservative* power! Memory has been defined as "the treasure house of the mind, wherein the monuments thereof are kept and preserved." Cicero spoke of it as the "*thesaurus omnium rerum*." By means of it nothing in life is lost.

"What wealth in memory's firm record,
Which, should it perish, could this world recall,
In colours fresh—originally bright—
From the dark shadows of o'erwhelming years."—*Young*.

Memory makes the fleeting present abiding and everlasting. How wonderful is its *reproductive* power! A very small circumstance will unlock and throw wide open its chamber doors; and words and deeds, scenes and circumstances, unthought of for many years, appear with startling vividness before us.

"Slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it
would fling

Aside for ever; it may be a sound—
A tone of music—summer's eve—or spring—
A flower—the wind—the ocean—which
shall wound,
Striking th' electric chain wherewith we're
darkly bound;
And how and why we know not, nor can
trace
Home to its cloud this lightning of the
mind,
But feel the shock renew'd, nor can efface
The blight and blackening which it leaves
behind."—*Byron*.

The Psalmist calls into exercise this wondrous power, for the relief of his troubled soul. He summons forth from the treasury of memory some of the ancient doings of God. The marvellous works which He had wrought on behalf of His people in former days he makes to live before him. Probably he also called to mind former deeds and ways of God in relation to his own individual life.

2. *Reflection on the works and ways of God.* "I will meditate also of all Thy work." Recollection would not have profited the Psalmist unless he had meditated upon the things which he recollected. Thought, meditation, enables us to realise the facts of history, science, philosophy, and theology, and to appropriate to ourselves their lessons. "If I should be asked," said Dr. Bates, "what I think are the best means and ways to advance the faculties, to make the ordinances fruitful, to increase

grace, to enlarge our comfort, and produce holiness, I should answer, meditation, meditation, meditation." The Psalmist acted wisely in following up his recollection by meditation.

3. *Speech concerning the works and ways of God.* "Talk of Thy doings." With the Psalmist recollection and reflection preceded speech. Much of our talk is utterly worthless, because the talkers are not thinkers. It is especially important in relation to religious subjects that meditation should precede speech. The Psalmist did not reserve to himself the results of his meditation, but declared them to others. Others were benefited by reason of his recollection and reflection.

II. *The troubled soul's conclusions on the works and ways of God.* Placing them in the order in which we find them, the conclusions of the Psalmist on the works and ways of God are, that they are characterised by holiness (ver. 13), strength (ver. 14), beneficence (vers. 15, 20), majesty (vers. 16-18), and mystery (ver. 19). Let us consider them, slightly altering their order.

1. *God's works and ways reveal His strength.* "Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people." God had made known His great power in crushing the enemies of His people, and delivering them from all their afflictions. No one can meditate upon the works of God in nature, or upon His ways in Providence, without being impressed with His Almightyness. "Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand." The Almightyness of God should be a *warning to evil-doers*. "Hast thou an arm like God?" The Almightyness of God should be an *encouragement to His people*. His strong arm is pledged to succour and defend you. He is "mighty to save."

2. *God's works and ways reveal His majesty.* In verses 16-18 the Psalmist mentions some of the mighty works of God in a very poetical manner. The imagery is both sublime and effective; and gives a deep impression, not only of the might of God in these transactions, but also of His majesty. If the

majesty of God is so impressive that the earth and the sea are represented as greatly moved thereat, shall man remain unmoved at the contemplation thereof? Is there nothing in the wondrous works and ways of God to awaken the admiration and reverence of men?

3. *God's works and ways reveal His holiness.* "O God, in holiness is Thy way." His way is often mysterious; and can never be comprehended by us, yet is it ever right and pure. The troubled Psalmist when he calmly considered the dealings of God with men, not in the present, in which only a very small fragment is visible, but in ancient time, was convinced that they were all in holiness. Trembling and troubled heart, and sorely perplexed with insoluble enigmas, look away and look calmly to His glorious deeds of ancient date, and thou, too, shalt conclude, "Thy way, O God, is in holiness."

4. *God's works and ways reveal His beneficence.* The manifestation of power and majesty is not sufficient to awaken trust and hope in us, or to afford any encouragement to the despondent and sorrowing heart. Being conscious of sin and ill-desert it is calculated to awaken anxiety and even dread. We fear lest the glorious majesty should consume us, and the great might should smite and destroy us. The revelation of the Divine holiness tends to make manifest the awful contrast between us and God in this respect, by showing the exceeding sinfulness of our hearts and lives. The troubled heart needs to know more of God than this before it can obtain comfort or rest. The Psalmist saw the Divine power and majesty working *beneficently*. The "mighty arm" of God was displayed in smiting down the wicked oppressor, and delivering the oppressed people. "Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." He saw Omnipotence gently and patiently leading His people through the wilderness. God is as great in mercy as He is in majesty. He is infinite in pity as well as in power. He is gracious as He is great. He is as tender as He is terrible. Here, then, may the troubled heart find peace.

5. *God's works and ways are mysterious.* The Psalmist had ascertained and declared certain characteristics of the works and ways of God. Might, majesty, holiness, and beneficence he had discovered therein. Yet there was much that remained obscure and mysterious. "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." There are certain topics upon which the Most High maintains an inviolable reserve. There are certain regions into which the eye of the most earnest inquirer has never penetrated. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God." Moreover, God's way is so vast that we are able to perceive only a very small portion of it. His purposes and methods are so comprehensive and profound that we can understand them only very partially. But this mystery was by no means pain-

ful to the Psalmist. He speaks of it calmly and trustfully; and then speaks of God's gracious guidance of His people through the wilderness. So also to us mysteries should not be an occasion of unbelief or sorrow, but of patient trust and hope. They should also teach us lessons of humility and reverence. Our own ignorance and inability to comprehend the ways of God should humble us. "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow." While the reserve of a Being of such holiness and benevolence should be regarded by us with reverence. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." "Mysteries! what are they but *worlds at night time* speeding on with swift wing to the all-revealing brightness of morning?"

SPIRITUAL INFIRMITIES.

(Verse 10.)

"I said, This is my infirmity."

When a good man is made sensible of any evil in his heart or life, he is ready to acknowledge it, and take shame to himself on account of it. "I said, This is my infirmity." No doubt but the Psalmist had often *said it to himself*; and such soliloquies are very becoming and may be very useful. *He said it also to God*, in a way of humble confession. "I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid," &c. Probably he might *say it to his intimate friends*, whose piety and sympathy he had often witnessed; for we are commanded to confess our faults one to another, and to pray one for another.

I. Inquire into the nature of that infirmity. By considering the context we may conclude that it consisted in something like the following—

1. *A proneness to live too much on frames and feelings.* This is common among Christians, and hinders their establishment and growth in grace. Those who live on spiritual frames will be like Reuben; unstable as water, they shall not excel. At one time they are

raised to a full assurance of faith, saying, "My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved;" and at another they are sinking into the depths of despondency, and saying, "Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will He be favourable no more?"

2. *Forgetfulness of past mercies is another evil to which good men are subject, and the natural consequence of this is unthankfulness.*

3. *Distrust with respect to future appearances.* When faith was in exercise David could say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" &c. (Ps. xxvii. 1-3). But here the Psalmist speaks as one that was utterly forsaken. "Will the Lord cast off for ever?" &c. (vers. 7-9).

4. *Refusing to be comforted in time of distress* (ver. 2). Moses told the children of Israel that the Lord would bring them out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and give them the land which He had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; but they hearkened not unto Moses, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

5. *Giving vent to distrustful thoughts in unbecoming language too frequently accompanies despondency.*

II. The reasons why God suffers such infirmities to attend His people in this life.

1. *To promote humility and self-abasement.* As creatures, our insignificance should make us humble; but as sinners we have reason to be still more so.

2. *To excite watchfulness.* Those who are liable to so many miscarriages ought certainly to be upon their guard. If nothing else will preserve the Christian from carnal security, yet the danger to which he is exposed should have that effect. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

3. *To increase our sympathy and compassion towards others.* We are made to know the heart of a stranger by being strangers ourselves. If others are overcome by temptation, we may be so too. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault," &c. (Gal. vi. 1, 2).

4. *To show the necessity of a frequent application to Christ, our spiritual Physician.* If we had no infirmities, we should not want healing. "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." The value of

the remedy is known by them that feel the disease, and the need of a Saviour by those who see themselves to be lost. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

5. *To render heaven the more desirable.* The Psalmist is now free from all his infirmities, and so will every saint be when he gets to glory. The conflicts we now have with the enemy, and the evils of our own hearts, will give a delightful relish to our happiness hereafter, and heighten the triumphs of the final victory (Ps. xvii. 15; 2 Cor. v. 1-4).

III. Conclude with a few observations.

1. *The best of saints have their infirmities.*

2. *There is some particular infirmity which every man may call his own.* "I kept myself," said David, "from mine iniquity;" that is, from the sin which most easily beset him.

3. *It becomes us well to know our particular infirmity, that we may guard against it; for to be without defence is the way to be overcome without resistance.*

4. *Having discovered what is our easily besetting sin, let us bewail it before God, and seek for help against it.—B . . . e.*

RECOLLECTION, REFLECTION, AND DECLARATION.

(Verses 11, 12.)

The Psalmist in his trouble seeks relief by recollecting the wondrous works of God, and reflecting and speaking thereon.

I. *Recollection.* "I will remember," &c. The powers of memory are twofold. They are the power of *retention*, and the power of *reproduction*. By virtue of the former, memory is the storehouse of past scenes, circumstances, events, words, deeds. By virtue of the latter we are enabled to reproduce and relive the past. Memory may be regarded in several aspects. 1. *As a source of pain.* Tennyson has beautifully and truthfully said,—

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

"Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain."*—Goldsmith.*

"Will no remorse, will no decay,
O Memory! soothe thee into peace?
When life is ebbing fast away,
Will not thy hungry vultures cease?
Ah, no! as weeds from fading free,
Noxious and rank, yet verdantly
Twine round a ruin'd tower;
So to the heart, untamed, will cling
The memory of an evil thing,

In life's departing hour:
Green is the weed when grey the wall
And thistles rise while turrets fall."

—Heraud.

2. *As a source of pleasure.* "A memory without blot or contamination," said Charlotte Brontë, "must be an

exquisite treasure,—an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment.”

“The joys I have possess’d are ever mine ;
Out of thy reach, behind eternity,
Hid in the sacred treasure of the past,
But bless’d remembrance brings them hourly
back.”—*Dryden*.

3. *As an aid to faith.* So the Psalmist uses it in this case. Observe, (1) *God’s works are wonders.* What marvellous things He is ever accomplishing in the material world ! What wonders He wrought on behalf of His ancient people ! How wonderful are His doings now in the experience of His people,—in their conversion, spiritual education, sanctification, and glorification ! Truly, “the bright glories of His grace, beyond His other wonders shine.” (2) *God’s wondrous works should be remembered.* Not to remember them would indicate great insensateness of mind. He who does not remember them overlooks the most glorious of records ; and cannot be held guiltless of ingratitude. (3) *God’s wondrous works remembered are calculated to inspire confidence.* They reveal a Being who is supremely trustworthy.

II. *Reflection.* “I will meditate,” &c. By means of reflection we are enabled to *realise* the facts recalled by memory, to perceive their significance and applications ; and the emotions which naturally spring from the facts remembered are excited by reflection. Recollection is of little worth comparatively, unless accompanied and followed by meditation. It was by the exercise of both these faculties that the troubled heart of the poet grew calm and victorious.

III. *Declaration.* “I will talk of Thy doings.” A good man, having passed through experiences similar to those of the Psalmist, should talk of God’s doings. After his trouble, recollection, and meditation, his talk would be—1. *Intelligent.* He would not utter crude or rash statements concerning God. 2. *Trust-inspiring.* His own faith would grow stronger as he recounted to others, &c. The faith of those who heard him would also grow as they thought of his conflict, and how he won the victory.

CONCLUSION.—Here is an example well worthy our imitation. Recollect, meditate, and *then* speak.

THE WAYS OF GOD.

(Verse 19.)

I. *God’s ways are vast in their extent.* “In the sea.” His ways are related—1. *To all ages*—past, present, future. 2. *To all worlds.* 3. *To all events.*

II. *God’s ways are profound in their meaning.* “In the great waters.” Not in streams or rivers, but in the immeasurable, unfathomable ocean. His ways are “too deep to sound with mortal lines.”

III. *God’s ways are mysterious in their aspect.* “Thy footsteps are not known,” cannot be always traced.

“They are not always known ; or they are not known in all things ; yea, they are not altogether known in anything.”

“The acknowledgment of mystery,” says Dr. Huntington, “the frank confession that our being is folded all about with the unknowable, our light fringed on every side with darkness, our little globe swimming in an ocean of unfathomable designs, but God guiding it on and caring for every passenger soul—this is an end of the trying of our faith.”

GOD LEADING HIS PEOPLE.

(Verse 20.)

I. *The Leader of the good.* “Thou.” The Leader possesses—1. *Unlimited*

power, for the protection and support of His people. 2. *Perfect intelligence.*

He knows His people individually and thoroughly. He is perfectly acquainted with the way along which they travel to their destination. 3. *Solicitous regard* for each member of the flock. He tenderly cares for every one, and for all.

II. The instruments by which they are led. "By the hand of *Moses and Aaron*." He still guides instrumentally. How? 1. *By His Providence*, pointing out our way by the indications of circumstances and current events. 2. *By His Word*, with its "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not." 3. *By His Spirit* influencing our spirits. 4. *By the counsel of His servants*. The wise and good are here to direct us.

III. The manner in which they are led. "*Like a flock*." We have here three ideas. 1. *Particularity*. The Eastern shepherds have a particular knowledge of each sheep, of its peculiarities, &c. And a name for each sheep. (See illus. in "The Land and the Book," by Dr. Thomson.) "He calleth his own sheep by name." "I am the good

Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine." 2. *Unity*. Though the distinctness and individuality of each one is preserved, yet they are not separated. They constitute a "*flock*." "One flock" under "one Shepherd." 3. *Leading* as contradistinguished from driving. The Eastern shepherd goes before his flock, and so leads them. "And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him; for they know His voice." Dr. Bushnell briefly, yet clearly and suggestively, states the idea—"He does not drive them on before as a herd of unwilling disciples, but goes before Himself, leading them into paths that He has trod, and dangers He has met, and sacrifices He has borne Himself, calling them after Him, and to be only followers."

"Jesus still lead on
Till our rest be won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow, calm and fearless:
Guide us by Thy hand
To our Fatherland."

—Zinzendorf.

PSALM LXXVIII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"Maschil of Asaph," i.e., an instruction of Asaph, a didactic song by Asaph. The Psalm was probably written by the celebrated Asaph in the time of David.

Occasion.—The Psalm seems to have been occasioned by the jealousy of the tribe of Ephraim, by reason of the position which the tribe of Judah held under David. For many years the haughty and powerful tribe of Ephraim was pre-eminent amongst the tribes. The sanctuary was placed in Shiloh, which is in this tribe. When David selected Jerusalem as the home of the sanctuary and the capital of the nation, "that haughty spirit which could brook no equal or superior chafed against the growing dominion of Judah" (Stanley). In this Psalm they are taught that what they regarded as a usurpation was in fact a Divine judgment; and the ten tribes are warned not to rebel against the Divine arrangements.

MAN'S RELATION TO THE LAW AND TESTIMONY OF GOD.

(Verses 1-8.)

The Psalm opens with a summons of the people to attention. The Poet speaks as one who has a right to be heard with respectful attention, and who is about to make statements which were worthy of their particular regard. From the second verse it seems as though the Psalmist regarded the historical facts mentioned in the subsequent part of the

Psalm as illustrations of spiritual facts and relationships. The history of the Israelites sets forth in clear light many aspects of human life and Divine providence. Amongst other things it strikingly illustrates—1. *The great goodness of God*, in His care of His people, in His guidance of them, &c. 2. *The abiding faithfulness of God*, in

fulfilling His promises and threatenings. 3. *The sad tendency of human nature to ingratitude and departure from God.* In this respect this history is a very painful one. 4. *The inviolable connection between sin and suffering.* These and other facts and tendencies of human life and the Divine government are set forth in striking and impressive aspects in this history.

The section now before us is introductory to the history recorded in the Psalm, and presents us with some important views of *Man's relation to the law and testimony of God.*

I. Man has received a knowledge of the will and works of God. The Hebrews were acquainted with the laws, moral and ceremonial, which God had given unto them. They also had ordinances of Divine institution which were abiding testimonies of the character and will of God, and of their relation to Him. They were also acquainted with the wonderful facts of their own national history. They had the *Scriptures*. Hengstenberg holds that "by the testimony and the law in verse 5 are meant the whole contents of the Pentateuch, the direct commandments contained in it, and the deeds of the Lord which are to be considered as indirect commandments." This Pentateuch, with its marvellous history, its Divine legislation, and its revelations of God and His will, they possessed. They had much knowledge which they had received by *tradition*. As children, their souls had been thrilled as they listened with rapt attention to the narratives of the wondrous and glorious works of God on behalf of their ancestors. Their memories were richly stored with these glorious deeds, and Divine revelations.

What a noble and precious heritage is ours in this respect! *We have the holy Word.* Not simply the Pentateuch; but the inspired hymns of the ancient poets, the wise instruction of men moved by the Holy Ghost, &c. "The holy Scriptures, which are able to make men wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." What a rich and blessed possession we have in the Bible!

"Most wondrous book! bright candle of the Lord!

Star of eternity! The only star
By which the bark of man can navigate
The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss
Securely; only star, which rose on time,
And, on its dark and troubled billows, still
As generation, drifting swiftly by,
Succeeded generation, threw a ray
Of heaven's own light, and to the hills of
God—

The everlasting hills—pointed the sinner's
eye." —Pollock.

We have also *religious instruction*. Much of the intellectual and spiritual wealth of the true and good of past ages has been handed down to us in books. The best utterances of the mind and heart of wise and holy men of this age are given to us in books. Who can estimate his indebtedness to literature? In our early days the earnest and loving teaching of Christian parents and Sunday school teachers was ours. And now we have the instruction, exhortation, and counsel of the Christian ministry. We have received a great and precious knowledge of the Divine will and way. The way of salvation is clearly made known unto us. "We see Jesus," and in Him God has revealed Himself to us. "He that hath seen Me," said Christ, "hath seen the Father."

II. Man should impart a knowledge of the will and works of God to others. The Israelites were distinctly and repeatedly commanded to impart religious knowledge to their children. (*Vide* Deut. iv. 9, vi. 6 and 7, and xi. 19.) It was a binding religious duty. To this the Psalmist refers in the fifth verse. The Psalmist's resolve to communicate this knowledge to posterity has two points worthy of notice. He resolves, 1. *To communicate a knowledge of His wondrous works.* "Showing to the generation to come His strength, and the wonderful works that He hath done." Their history was peculiarly rich in marvellous and glorious deeds which He had done on their behalf, and in judgments with which He had visited them by reason of their numerous and heinous sins. It was plenteously stored with wise teaching, and helpful encouragement to faithfulness, and grave warning against evil. He will impart to the

children a knowledge of this remarkable history. He resolves, 2. To communicate a knowledge of His wondrous works *that the generation to come might praise the Lord.* He will narrate God's glorious deeds of ancient date, not that national pride might be promoted thereby, but that God might be glorified. His was the power, and His shall be the praise. He will show to the children "the praises of the Lord."

We, too, are bound to transmit to posterity the religious knowledge and the spiritual privileges that we enjoy. Our Lord lays down the principle with transparent clearness—"Freely ye have received, freely give."

"Heav'n doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves,
For if our virtues do not go forth of us
'Twere all alike as if we had them not."
—Shakespeare.

The coming generations will need the knowledge of God that we possess. Our systems of philosophy and theology they may do without, our human creeds and religious formulæ they may in many things outgrow. But our knowledge of God, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ and His redemption, the generations that are to come will need. Nay, without it they will be undone.

III. Man should impart a knowledge of the will and works of God to others with a noble aim. The object of the impartation of this knowledge is thus stated by the Psalmist—"That the generation to come might know them, the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children," &c. (vers. 6-8).

The object then aimed at was—

1. *That the knowledge might be continued to the race.* We have received from our fathers great treasures of information and experience, of knowledge and wisdom, and every generous emotion and every conviction of duty strongly urge us to hand them down to coming ages. If it is not in our power to make much addition to the treasures of the past, we can at least with scrupulous fidelity do our share to transmit those treasures undiminished to the coming generations.

2. *That the coming generations might avoid the errors and sins of their ancestors.* "That they might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that prepared not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." The history of the Israelites abounds with painful illustrations of the statements of this verse. With sad frequency throughout their journeyings in the wilderness they manifested a murmuring, stubborn, and rebellious spirit. Again and again they forsook the Lord God, and worshipped the idols of the idolatrous nations around them. Their history was to be made known that their posterity might take warning and shun their errors. Let us point out to the generations to come the sins of past ages with their consequences, that they may avoid them.

3. *That the coming generations might be righteous.* "That they might keep His commandments." Let us so teach the law of God to the uprising generation that they shall regard it as "holy, just, and good," a Divinely wise and benevolent thing, and shall loyally and heartily seek to comply with its requirements.

4. *That the coming generations might be religious.* "That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God." Two things are aimed at in this. (1) *A recognition of the Divine presence and activity.* "Not forget the works of God." God is ever working in the universe, in history, in redemption. History should be studied with reverence as well as with inquisitiveness, for God has been working in it. Our life should be lived holily, for God is ever active within us and around us. In imparting instruction let us aim at the recognition of the Divine presence and agency by the generations to come—that the history, science, and philosophy of the future might not be materialistic, atheistic, but intelligent, humble, reverent. (2) *A calm trust in the Divine Being.* "Set their hope in God," i.e., "place their trust in God." Let us endeavour to represent God to our children truthfully, in His Divine beauty, in His all-sufficiency, in His perfect reliableness, that so they

might be attracted to Him, and be led to repose in Him with supreme and unflinching trust.

Here, then, we have a grand end in imparting a knowledge of the will and works and ways of God—the continuation and increase of knowledge, the avoidance of error and sin, the promotion of Divine righteousness and religiousness amongst men—in a word, the furtherance of human progress in its path towards perfection.

FOR A SABBATH-SCHOOL ANNIVERSARY.

(Verses 2-8.)

The text is the preface or introduction to the whole Psalm.

It shows the design of Asaph in its composition.

Its design was the instruction of children.

Its style—parabolic and enigmatical. Spiritual truths hidden under narration of facts.

I. The interesting objects of our solicitude mentioned. Consider—

1. *The love which welcomes them.* The love of mother, father, friends.

2. *The evils which surround them.* A sinful nature within. Evil example without; public house, theatre, &c.

3. *The possibilities which await them.* Greatness in good or in evil.

II. The sacred duties which we owe to them.

First: They are weak; we must protect them. Jacob's children, and Esau. (Gen. xxxii.)

The race advances, the world makes progress. Christianity is spreading and diffusing widely its blessings. Each generation grows richer in the highest knowledge and wisdom than its predecessor was. The time comes on apace when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." *Are we each doing what we can to usher in that time?*

Second: They are helpless; we must provide for them.

Third: They are ignorant; we must instruct them.

1. *The nature of this duty.* What must we teach?

(1) *The praises of the Lord.* "Out of the mouth," &c. (Ps. viii. 2).

(2) *The strength of the Lord.*

(3) *The wonderful works of the Lord.* In nature, providence, grace.

2. *The importance of this duty.* The docility and impressibility of children.

3. *The way to perform this duty.* Parents, Christians, example, precept.

III. The object which we hope shall be realised.

1. *The knowledge of truth shall be perpetuated.*

2. *Our children will put their hope in God.*

3. *They shall be better than their fathers.*

—B. D. from *The Study*.

OUR RELATION TO OUR ANCESTORS AND SUCCESSORS.

(Verses 3 and 4.)

Consider—

I. Our great obligations to our ancestors. 1. *For the Bible.* 2. *For a glorious literature.* How vast the number of books which are characterised by high and deep thinking, and pure and reverent feeling! 3. *For holy and heroic examples.* Martyrs, reformers, and a great multitude of obscure yet faithful and noble lives. 4. *For religious teaching.* We are immeasurably

indebted to those who in the home, the school, and the church, have instructed us.

II. Our great duty to our successors.

1. *To hand down to them intact the heritage of religious intelligence and privilege which we possess.* 2. *To seek to increase that heritage.* The stream of blessing should grow broader and deeper. 3. *To endeavour to lead them to prize and improve their heritage.* That they

may not only know His will, but do it ; not only know His wondrous works, but praise and trust Him.

Be it ours to contribute something to the promotion of the progress of our race in all that is true, wise, and good.

MORAL COWARDICE AND ITS CAUSES.

(Verses 9-11.)

The term "the children of Ephraim" is not used here in contradistinction to the rest of Israel, but as representing the whole, because of the prominent position of that tribe. "For more than four hundred years Ephraim, with its two dependent tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin, exercised undisputed pre-eminence. Joshua the first conqueror ; Gideon the greatest of the judges, whose brothers were 'as the children of kings,' and whose children all but established hereditary monarchy in their own line ; Saul, the first king—belong to one or other of these three tribes." The haughty spirit of the tribe "could brook no equal or superior, and chafed against the rise even of the kindred tribe of Manasseh in the persons of Gideon and Jephthah, and yet more against the growing dominion of Judah in David and Solomon, till it threw off the yoke altogether, and established an independent kingdom."—(Stanley).

It seems clear to us that the Psalm does not refer to the disruption of the kingdom ; but that our text refers to an event or series of events during the period of the Judges. We propose to regard the text as an illustration of *Moral Cowardice and its Causes*. Let us consider—

I. The illustration of moral cowardice. "The children of Ephraim, armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Whether this refers to one specific battle, or to several battles, or whether "the Ephraimites are merely compared to cowardly bowmen," we need not attempt to decide. In either case they are charged with cowardice. The greatness of this cowardice is apparent from three facts. 1. *They were men of might.* Ephraim was a warlike tribe, famed for valiant men. Joshua was of this tribe. Perhaps they are specially named here because of their proud,

domineering, boastful spirit. 2. *They were fully armed.* They were not surprised and attacked at a disadvantage. They were "armed and carrying bows." Proud, boastful, powerful, and well armed, yet—3. *They refused to fight.* "Turned back in the day of battle." A brave English drummer boy was taken captive in some battle by the French. He was ordered to beat several military signals, and obeyed. But, being commanded to beat a retreat, he pertinaciously refused. He had never beaten a retreat, and he never would do so. Unlike this heroic lad, the Israelites, with the strong and warlike tribe of Ephraim, turned their back to their foes and fled. A picture of what has often been the case in our spiritual history. We have been bold and courageous in speech, we have been supplied with weapons from the Divine armoury, yet we have fled before our foes, have weakly yielded to temptation, and dishonoured our uniform and our colours.

II. The causes of moral cowardice. "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law," &c.

1. *They lacked the support of conscience.* If conscience is with us in arduous and perilous enterprises, it will nerve the heart with courage and fill the arm with energy.

"What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted ?

Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just ;
And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

—Shakespeare.

But this "heart untainted" the men of Ephraim had not. "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law." Conscience in them was an accusing voice. And the consciousness of guilt "makes cowards of us all." "The wicked flee when no man pursueth," &c.

"Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind ;
The thief doth fear each bush an officer."
—*Shakespeare.*

If in our moral battles we would stand before our enemies, we need a clear self-approving conscience. Without it "every noise appals" us ; with it we may be as "bold as a lion."

2. *They lacked the inspiration to be drawn from the recollection of past interpositions of God on their behalf.* "They forgot His works, and His wonders that He had showed them." When David did battle with Goliath of Gath, he was inspired and fortified by the recollection of what God had done for him and by him in former times. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." In this spirit he met the foe, and speedily the proud, gigantic champion of Philistia fell before the shepherd boy, who trusted in the God who had aided him in the past. But the glorious doings of God on behalf of Israel were shamefully forgotten by them, and, when they went forth to battle, the inspiration, which they would have had if they had remembered His works, was missing, and they cowardly turned back. If we would meet the foes of the future hopefully and courageously we need to remember the victories of the past devoutly and thankfully.

3. *They lacked the help of God.* They did not seek Him whose covenant they had violated, and whose law they had disregarded. They could not trust Him

whose wondrous works on their behalf they had basely allowed to sink into forgetfulness. And so they went up to battle without the Lord, and returned from battle dishonoured. "O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turneth their backs upon their enemies? And the Lord said, Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them ; therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies."

As we contemplate this picture, let us learn the lessons which it has for us. We, too, have enemies which are both subtle and powerful—Satanic temptation, evil in society, proneness to sin in ourselves. We must battle with courage and fortitude against these foes, or they will vanquish us, and that means ruin. Complete and splendid armour, both offensive and defensive, is provided for us (Eph. vi. 11–18). Let us gird it on. And in this holy war let us go forth in the strength of God, and we shall return victorious. It has been well said that, "Courage consists not in blindly overlooking danger, but in seeing it, and conquering it." We need moral courage ; and for that we must have an approving conscience, the memory of past victories won by the help of God, and an unflinching trust in Him. Without these, as cowards we shall turn our back to the foes. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

SCENES FROM A REMARKABLE HISTORY.

(Verses 12–20.)

In these verses we have a brief record of some of God's wonderful and gracious dealings with His people, and of their great sin against Him. On the one side, the portion of history here referred to is luminous with the great and beneficent works of the Lord ; on the other side, it is dark with the basest ingratitude, unbelief, and perversity of man. We have here—

I. A people divinely emancipated.

By great signs and wonders wrought on their behalf Jehovah had delivered them from the cruel oppression of the Egyptians. His hand was clearly manifest—

1. *In their deliverance out of Egypt.* "Marvellous things did He in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan." It was because of His blessing that, notwithstanding their oppressions, they increased and multiplied and gathered power in Egypt

It was because of the wonders wrought by Him on their behalf, the stroke after stroke of judgment, each one severer than its [predecessors, with which He smote their tyrannical lords, that they were at length permitted to go forth from the land of bondage.

2. *In their deliverance from their pursuers at the Red Sea.* Narrate the circumstances of the departure from Egypt, the encampment by the sea, the pursuit of the Egyptians after them, the apparently desperate situation in which they were placed, their alarm, murmurings, &c.; the prayer of Moses, the answer of Jehovah, &c. "He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters to stand as an heap." "On a sudden," writes the late Dean Milman, "Moses advances towards the sea, extends his rod, and a violent wind from the east begins to blow. The waters recede on both sides, a way appears; at nightfall, probably about eight o'clock, the caravan begins to defile along this awful pass. The wind continued in the same quarter all the night, but immediately they had passed over, and while the Egyptians, madly plunging after them, were in the middle of the passage, the wind as suddenly fell, the waters rushed back into their bed, the heavy chariot-wheels of the pursuers sank into the sand, broke and overthrew the chariots, and in this state of confusion the sea swept over the whole host, and overwhelmed the king and all the flower of the Egyptian army." We have in this a triple wonder:—(1.) *The division of the sea.* This was no ordinary phenomenon of nature, but an extraordinary manifestation of the presence and power of God. (2.) *The preparation of the road.* When the waters were divided, the bed of the sea would not have been in a fit state for the great multitude to pass over, had not Jehovah prepared it for their passage. (3.) *The encouraging of the people* to pass through the opening made for them. Such an unbelieving and craven-hearted crowd of serfs needed an infusion of courage ere they would have attempted to make such a passage. The Lord "caused them to pass through." If ever any

people were emancipated by God, the Israelites were when they came forth from the land of Egypt. His hand was manifestly outstretched to subdue the pride of the oppressors, and to rescue the oppressed from thralldom.

II. A people divinely led. "In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire." "The fiery, cloudy pillar" went before them in all their journeyings. 1. *They were led constantly.* In the day the cloud led them on ward, and at night the pillar of fire moved mysteriously and majestically before them. 2. *They were led divinely.* The guiding pillar was not merely a sign to indicate their way, but a visible symbol of the presence of God. He Himself guided them. Rightly understood, the cloud and the fire were an assurance that God was with them to lead them, to protect them, to provide for them. *What a proof of the goodness of God to them we have in this!*

III. A people divinely provisioned. "He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths," &c. Upon two occasions, at the command of God, Moses had smitten a rock, and water had flowed forth in abundance. (*Vide* Exod. xvii. 6, Num. xx. 11.) But it was not simply water that God provided for them, but food and raiment also. "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." "I have led you," said Moses, "forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot." 1. *Their supplies were abundant.* "As out of the great depths; . . . caused waters to run down like rivers." Whatever God gives, He gives abundantly. His hand is free and bounteous. And if at any time the Israelites suffered from hunger or thirst it was by reason of their unbelief, or to humble them and impress them with their dependence upon God. 2. *Their supplies were divine.* An un-riven rock was a most unlikely object from which to obtain water. Rocks are "not capable of receiving it either from the clouds above or the springs beneath." Yet, when smitten by Moses,

water copiously flowed from them. Moses was but the instrument of Jehovah in this matter. Moses smote the rocks, but God clave them and brought forth streams from them. 3. *Their supplies are illustrative of ours.* Ours are divine. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," &c. Ours are abundant. "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

IV. **A people basely perverse and wicked.** "And they sinned yet more against Him, by provoking the Most High in the wilderness," &c. (vers. 17-20). Notice here,—

1. *Divine signs leading to profane curiosity.* The miracles which God had wrought on their behalf should have impressed the Israelites with a deep sense of the presence and power of God; and should have been to them signs of His almightiness, His hatred of tyranny and oppression, and His interest in the oppressed and afflicted. But, with amazing and saddening perversity, they regarded God with little more of reverence than the Egyptians did their magicians and sorcerers. They had seen the divine wonders, but failed to recognise in them divine signs. Having witnessed marvellous displays of His power, sinful curiosity is awakened within them, and they ask, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can He give bread also?" &c. They should have been humble, reverent, trustful; they were curious, profane, presumptuous.

2. *Divine providence leading to a desire for the indulgence of appetite.* The provision which God made for them seems to have awakened in them neither gratitude, contentment, nor faith; but a desire for the gratification of their animal appetite by a greater variety in their diet. And, with awful audacity and presumption, they tempted God by their questions as to His power, and by their demands upon Him. They "demanded meat for their lust" (נפש = here, the animal soul). It was not a desire for what was necessary, but a craving for variety. And this craving was expressed, not as a humble request, but as an insolent demand, accompanied

by profane questions as to the limit of the Divine power. This sin took its rise in the heart. There the evil desire sprang up and was fostered into strength. Then it expressed itself in speech. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

3. *Divine goodness responded to by human distrust and ingratitude.* No song of thankfulness arises from them as they call to mind the great goodness of God to them, but an impious challenge to Him to supply them with flesh. They utter no holy declaration of confidence in Him as they recall His wondrous works, but distrustful, irreverent inquiries.

As we look upon this picture of extreme wickedness, let us remember that it was an utter perversion of the dealings of God with them. God's emancipation, guidance, and provisioning of them were both adapted and intended to awaken within them contentment, trust in Him, gratitude, and reverence to Him. But their own sinful hearts wickedly perverted the Divine relation to them and dealings with them in the way we have indicated. We have a power by which we may make evil the occasion of good. We may gather patience out of suffering. By means of defeat we may learn how to conquer. Through trial we may grow in strength and grace. But by the abuse of this power we may pervert a means of grace into an occasion of evil, out of the Divine longsuffering may educe arguments in favour of impenitence and presumption, may so treat God's richest blessings that they shall become to us a dire curse.

CONCLUSION.—1. *See the terrible effects of slavery.* These Israelites would not have been so utterly base, irreligious, and despicable had not their manhood been eaten out of them by slavery. Physical oppression had left them mere serfs in spirit.

2. *See the depravity of human nature.* In the midst of the richest goodness and the divinest signs, it remains ungrateful, unbelieving, impious.

3. *See our need of Divine preservation.* "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

DIVINE BLESSINGS.

(Verses 15, 16.)

I. Divine blessings from unlikely sources. Water from solid rocks. Emancipation of the Hebrews by means of the shepherd Moses. Redemption out of Nazareth. The Light of the World from a carpenter's shop. Jesus Christ was "a root out of dry ground." Most of the apostles were "unlearned and ignorant men." Tenderness, trust, triumph out of suffering. Spiritual wealth out of temporal loss.

II. Divine blessings in rich abundance. "As out of the great depths, . . . like rivers." All pure blessings God gives abundantly. Light, air, dew, beauty, &c., He gives abundantly. "Abundantly pardon." "Plentuous re-

demption." "Peace as a river, righteousness as the waves of the sea." "Make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things," &c.

III. A type of the supreme blessing. 1 Cor. x. 3 and 4. "That Rock was Christ."

Analogy—1. *In the blessings.* Christ gives "the water of life." 2. *In the mode of obtaining them.* The rock was smitten and cleft. Christ "was wounded," &c. 3. *In the conditions of bestowal.* "Freely." "Without money and without price." The river of life flows freely by, we have but to stoop down and drink.

HUMAN SIN AND DIVINE JUDGMENT.

(Verses 21-31.)

In these verses we see how God regarded the conduct described in the preceding paragraph, and how He responded to the insolent demands of the Hebrews. The main teaching of this portion of the Psalm may be developed under two main topics.

I. Human Sin. We have here the Divine view of the sin of the perverse Israelites.

1. *The nature of their sin.* Unbelief. "They believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation." They doubted either the power or the goodness of God, or both. He had given to them signal displays of His might and majesty, yet they perversely questioned His ability to provide for them. He had also given to them gracious assurances that He would guide, guard, and supply them, yet they seem to have doubted these assurances. Herein was their great sin in the sight of God. Unbelief is a sin which directly dishonours the Divine being and character. Amongst men of honour it is a great insult to discredit the word of another. But what shall we say of the sin of discrediting the word of God? It is an impeach-

ment of His faithfulness. Or a tacit declaration that we doubt His ability to fulfil His promise. But whether we doubt His willingness or His ability to keep His promises, His goodness or His power, we dishonour Him. To this sin the Hebrews in the wilderness were very prone. It is lamentably prevalent in the present day. There are many sincere Christians who are often guilty in this respect. They fail to believe God's promises, &c. In this Christian dispensation unbelief towards Christ is the damning sin. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

2. *The aggravation of their sin.* "Though He had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors," &c. (vers. 22-25). The aggravation of their sin in distrusting God in the matter of provision is seen in that, (1) *He had hitherto supplied them with food.* Though journeying in a wilderness, yet they had not suffered from the lack of anything. God had provided for their wants. He had supplied them with water (Exod. xv. 25, xvii. 6), and quails (Exod. xvi. 13), and with a regular supply of manna (Exod. xvi. 14-26).

(2) *He had supplied them with choice food.* "The corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food." The word translated "angels" has been variously rendered. But whatever rendering be adopted, the idea of rare, choice food is presented. The Hebrews in the wilderness were not supplied with coarse, common fare. Their food was delicate in its nature and rich in quality, such as is found on the tables of nobles or princes. Or it was so delicious and rare that, coming down as it did from heaven, the poet naturally speaks of it as "angels' food." (3) *He had supplied them with choice food in abundance.* "He sent them meat to the full." There was no lack of provisions. The supply was as abundant in quantity as it was rich in quality. (4) *He had supplied them with choice food supernaturally.* The water was drawn from the rock miraculously. Concerning the manna, Dr. C. E. Stowe, writing in Smith's "Bible Dict.," says, "The manna of Scripture we regard as wholly miraculous, and not in any respect a product of nature." The people had not to put forth any effort to procure this provision, except the mere gathering of it. It was manifestly the special provision of God for them. Yet "they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation." On this very question of their food supply they had distrusted God, and insolently called into question His power. While subsisting upon provisions miraculously supplied by God, and which clearly manifested His abounding goodness, they basely distrust Him and impiously propose to submit His power to tests of their invention. Much of the unbelief of this age is painfully aggravated in its character. When men do not trust Christ as their Saviour, is not their guilt the greater because His qualifications as such are so ample and convincing—in His teaching, miracles, life, resurrection, and in the witness of a great and ever-increasing multitude who have trusted Him and proved Him all-sufficient? When men distrust the providence of God in their lives, is not their sin aggravated by the abundant evidence of the universality, wisdom, and beneficence of that providence?

When Christian men distrust the power, or faithfulness, or goodness of God, does not His gift of Christ to us make the sin of such distrust much greater? "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The sin of the Israelites in its essential principle is deplorably common to day.

II. Divine judgment. "Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel. He caused," &c. (vers. 26-31). This judgment against Israel,—

1. *Reveals God's observation of man's life.* "The Lord heard." All human speech is audible to the Divine ear. During a dark period in the history of the ancient church, the few faithful and godly men "spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard," &c. He hears the voice of prayer and of praise. Words of murmuring, complaint, and unbelief are heard and registered in heaven. The hard speeches and awful blasphemies of the wicked find their way to the ear of God. God is the great Auditor of human utterances. No sound escapes His ear.

2. *Reveals God as affected by man's life.* He not only hears, but feels also. "The Lord heard, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel." God is affected by man's life. Our trust and praise of Him are gratifying to Him. Our distrust of Him and our murmuring against Him are grievous to Him. Men cannot tempt Him, or impiously challenge Him to display His power, as did the Hebrews in the wilderness, without provoking Him to anger. Let no one deceive himself in this matter. There is in God a principle of anger which burns with unquenchable fire against evil. While God is God His wrath must burn against sin. Being good and righteous He must punish evil doers unless they turn and repent.

3. *Reveals the punishment as growing out of man's sin.* (1) *In the granting of their own demands.* "They demanded meat for their lust." Theirs was not an

urgent prayer, which submits even the most eager desires to His will; but an impious demand that God would give them meat for the gratification of their animal appetite. God complied with their demand, and that which they had so eagerly coveted proved a great curse to them. The flesh which they had demanded occasioned their death. Let us beware of urging selfish desires in prayer to God. In every petition that we present to the throne of grace let us copy the example of Him who in His most impassioned prayer said, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Who has not become acquainted with instances in which God has granted the passionate demand that has been made to Him, and the demander has lived to rue the day when the demand was made and granted? What seems to us unquestionably desirable and good, may really be a thing of great peril and evil to us. The well-watered plain of Sodom nearly led to the ruin of Lot. That sick child over whom fond parents bend in anguish, and whose life they demand God to spare, may perchance grow up, and bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. "Not my will, but Thine be done." (2) *In their gluttony.* When they had eaten of the quails which God sent into the camp, "and were well filled; they were not estranged from their lust." They had eaten as much, or even more, than their physical nature required and could appropriate, yet they would have more. The drunkard and the glutton are never satisfied. And by the gluttony with which they devoured the flesh that they had demanded, "the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the young of Israel."

"Heaven is most just, and of our pleasant vices

Makes instruments to scourge us."

—*Shakespeare.*

"Whatsoever a man soweth that shall

he also reap." In the judgments of God against sin there is nothing arbitrary. A sinner's punishment is the natural fruit of His sin. The hell of every sinner is developed out of his own corrupt heart. Let the wicked be warned. They are "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

4. *Reveals the punishment as being brought about by the forces of nature.* "He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind." By means of a south-east wind, God brought immense quantities of quails into the camp of Israel. This wind is so spoken of as to lead us to conclude that it was miraculous. By His direct agency, He caused it to blow from that particular quarter. All the powers of nature are under His command. He can employ them as He pleases. The winds are His couriers, carrying messages of judgment or of mercy to men. Again, let the wicked be warned. You are not only preparing your own punishment, but God may command nature's forces to aid in carrying out His judgment upon you. You are gathering the materials for your own hell-fire, and God may despatch the lightning-flash which shall kindle them into a blaze.

CONCLUSION. — Let us especially ponder,—1. *The great evil of unbelief.* It is a reflection cast upon God; it grieves Him, &c. 2. *The peril of unsubmitiveness in prayer.* "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." 3. *The terribleness of the Divine anger.* "The wrath of the Lamb; the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" 4. *The certainty of Divine retribution.* The only way by which we may escape hell is by getting rid of a sinful character. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

MAN'S PROVOCATION OF GOD, AND GOD'S PATIENCE WITH MAN.

(Verses 32-41.)

I. Man's provocation of God. "They sinned still, and believed not for His wondrous works." In the verses before us the Psalmist mentions two chief features of their provocation of God.

1. *Their persistence in evil.* They persevered in their *unbelief*. All the wondrous works which they had witnessed failed to quicken faith in them. Notwithstanding the many miracles which God had wrought in their sight, they still doubted His power. Notwithstanding His great and constant kindness to them, they still doubted His goodness. It was thus that they "limited the Holy One of Israel." They regarded His willingness and ability to aid them as bounded. Man's unbelief ever limits and dishonours God. They also persevered in their *murmuring and rebellious spirit*. "How often did they rebel in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert?" When any inconvenience met them, or any difficulty or privation confronted them, they at once fell to murmuring against Moses and against the Lord. Their mean and ungrateful spirits were constantly turning to thoughts and feelings of rebellion against God. And this, notwithstanding all God's efforts to effect their moral reformation. His mercies awoke no feeling of humility, gratitude, or trust in them; but were followed by exhibitions of selfishness and unreasonable exaction. His judgments produced no lasting improvement in their character; for, as soon as they were removed, the people returned to their old courses. "For all this they sinned still." What a correct representation is this of many sinners to-day! God has enriched them with countless blessings, but His goodness has not led them to repentance. He has smitten them with the rod of affliction, but they have not turned in penitence to Him. He has stripped them of temporal prosperity, He has taken from them the desire of their eyes at a stroke, He has shut them up in loneliness and sorrow of heart, yet have they not turned unto Him. He seems to

have used every means for their salvation; yet "for all this they sinned still."

2. *Their spurious repentance.* When God's severe judgments were upon Israel they sought Him in apparent humility and penitence. But their penitence was neither deep nor sincere. (1.) *The confessions and promises which they made to God were untrue.* "They did flatter Him with their mouth, and they lied unto Him with their tongues. They could not deceive Him. Yet their repentance was false. Their prayers and professions made in affliction were not hearty, but were extorted by suffering. And the promises they made to God were not kept, but forgotten when the pain and peril were removed. (2.) *Their heart was not really turned to God.* "Their heart was not right with Him." In true repentance the soul turns from sin with loathing and abhorrence, and seeks God with humility, and faith, and prayer. It was not the sin that they shrank from, but the penalties of the sin. (3.) *Their life remained unchanged.* "Neither were they steadfast in His covenant." The promises made in affliction were speedily broken. Addison says that repentance is "the relinquishment of any practice, from the conviction that it has offended God. Sorrow, fear, and anxiety are properly not parts, but adjuncts of repentance; yet they are too closely connected with it to be easily separated." Shakspeare defines it thus: "Repentance is heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing." But the Israelites did not relinquish their sinful practices. A "clear life" did not follow their pretended repentance. "He who seeks repentance for the past, should woo the angel virtue for the future." But they provoked God by their frequent rebellions. His heart was grieved, and pained by their many and heinous sins against Him.

II. God's patience with man. This was manifested in—

1. *His judgments upon them.* "Their days did He consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. He slew them." His

judgments were severe, but not so severe as they had deserved. They were not sufficiently severe to restrain the people from returning to their evil ways. And when they cried unto him, or Moses entreated Him for them, He withdrew His stroke away from them. And as for their bootless wanderings in the wilderness—were such craven-hearted creatures the men to go up against the Canaanites and conquer them? Retaining, as they did, the spirit of slaves, were they fit to be intrusted with freedom and independence in a land of their own? In His very judgments God manifested His patience and mercy, or, instead of leaving them to live out their life in the wilderness, He would have consumed them in His anger when they had provoked Him by their unbelief, and murmurings, and rebellion.

2. *His mercies to them.* “He being full of compassion forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.” In their base rebellions He did not destroy them. Though they had provoked Him many times, yet many times He turned His anger away from them. And when He did visit them in judgment, He did not pour the full flood of His fury upon them. “He did not deal with them after their sins, nor reward them according to their iniquities.” “He forgave their iniquity.” He not only removed the dark and threatening clouds of His wrath, but He lifted upon them the light of His forgiving and favouring countenance. How graciously and completely God forgives! “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” “Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy

back.” “Thou hast cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” “He will abundantly pardon.” Thus graciously and patiently God has dealt with us.

3. *His remembrance of them.* “He remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.” He remembered their *frailty and corruption*. “They were flesh,” and liable to suffering and pain. “They were flesh,” and exposed to temptation, and prone to evil; and, therefore, He had long patience with them. He spared them when He would otherwise have destroyed them. He had compassion on them. He remembered their *evanescence*. “A wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.” “Life is a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

“How short is human life! the very breath Which frames my words, accelerates my death.” —H. More.

The Lord remembered this, and spared them when their sins loudly called for their destruction.

This subject urges its—1. *Warning to all who have long persisted in evil.* This generation so patiently borne with, so mercifully dealt with, at last found their graves in the wilderness. Beware lest through further persistence in evil your life ends in utter failure as regards all that is true and good. 2. *Encouragement even to the most sinful to seek the Lord.* His long patience with you proclaims His willingness to pardon and save you. Turn unto Him heartily in true repentance (Isa. lv. 6, 7). 3. *Counsel to all.* Let us not frustrate God's gracious dealings with us. By judgments and by mercies He seeks to save us. Let us trust Him, and earnestly enter into His gracious designs concerning us.

MAN UNDER DIVINE CHASTISEMENT.

(Verses 34-37.)

I. **Man under Divine chastisement sorely smitten.** “When He slew them.” See the case before us in this Psalm, vers. 30 and 31. Examples are frequently transpiring. There are some who, like this generation of Israelites, seem to need stroke upon stroke of the

rod of God. (Comp. Isa. i. 4 and 5.)

II. **Man under Divine chastisement remembering God.** “They remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High,” &c. “Reflection followed infliction.” They remembered God—

1. *As their Rock.* Three ideas here: (1.) *Security.* "He shall dwell on high: His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." (2.) *Stability.* "A stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." (3.) *Shelter.* "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

2. *As their Redeemer.* He had redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt; therefore He was able to save them, and worthy of their trust.

III. Man under Divine chastisement seeking God. "Then they sought Him; and they returned and inquired," &c.

1. "*They returned,*" implying that they had departed from God. Here we have the reason of the chastisement.

2. "*They inquired* early after God." In their prosperity they had forgotten God, in their affliction they promptly inquired after Him.

3. "*They sought Him.*" Aforetime they had neglected and forsaken Him; now they search for Him by prayers and sacrifices. How inexpressibly mean. "Like whipped curs, they licked their Master's feet."

IV. Man under Divine chastisement offering to God unreal repentance. "Nevertheless they did flatter Him," &c., vers. 36 and 37. Repentance begotten of terror or suffering dies when the terror or suffering is removed. Their penitence was pretence. "Under

the pressure of heavy judgments, the loss of property, the loss of friends, or the failure of health, men become serious, and resolve to give attention to religion. It is rarely that such purposes are founded in sincerity, and that the conversions apparently resulting from them are true conversions." "The devil cannot be whipped out of human nature, though another devil, namely hypocrisy, may be whipped into it." "Good resolutions called at their hearts as men do at inns; they tarried awhile, and then took their leave." Two main features of true repentance were wanting to them. 1. *Change of heart.* "Their heart was not right with Him." In true repentance sin is regarded as the "abominable thing," and the sinner turns from it to God. But "they would fain be rid of their sufferings, but did not care to be rid of their sins."

2. *Reformation of life.* "Neither were they steadfast in His covenant." The truly penitent turn "from evil and do good." They "make haste and delay not to keep God's commandments." But the Israelites "sinned still." How awful to offer to God a mockery and a sham!

CONCLUSION.—1. *Remember the fate of this generation of the Israelites, and take warning.* 2. *Consider the mercy that sought to save them both by favours and by judgments, believe in it, accept it, and be saved.*

THE EXERCISE OF THE DIVINE MERCY.

(Verses 38, 39.)

I. In holding back deserved punishment. "He destroyed them not," &c. Notice—

1. *Their sins against God were very heinous.* Ingratitude, though His goodness to them was very great. Unbelief, though they had much to quicken and strengthen faith. Rebellion, though God's rule over them had been marked by so much patience and generosity. 2. *Their sins against God were very numerous.* "How oft did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert." Many a time turned He His anger away." God's forbearing mercy was manifested—(1.) *In not inflicting*

the judgments threatened (Deut. ix. 13–20; Num. xiv. 11–21). (2.) *In only partially inflicting the judgments threatened.* As in the case of the judgment of the fiery flying serpents, and the healing of the diseased and dying by means of the brazen serpent. And others. How frequently when we have sinned has God graciously turned His anger away from us.

II. In forgiving great iniquities. How frequently God forgives. "Not until seven times; but until seventy times seven." "He aboundeth in forgiveness." How completely God forgives. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be

red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I, I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." He not only removes His condemnation from us, but lifts upon us the light of His countenance.

III. In compassionating human frailties. "He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind," &c. He remembered—

1. *Man's tendency to sin.* "*Flesh.*" Our carnal appetites are depraved. By means of the flesh the soul is frequently tempted to evil.

MAN'S LIFE UPON EARTH.

(Verse 39.)

"He remembered that they were but flesh," &c.

I. The weakness of human life. "He remembered that they were but flesh." Man is here regarded—

1. *As having a tendency to evil.* "The flesh lusteth against the spirit." Animal appetites are often opposed to spiritual aspirations. Animal passions to moral principles.

2. *As being subject to weakness, affliction, and pain.* There is much of physical suffering in human life upon earth, and the mystery and pain of death at the close.

II. The unsubstantiality of human life. "*Wind.*"

"Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."—*Shakespeare.*

Of the work of the most gifted and laborious of men how little result remains! Man himself passes away, leaving few traces behind him.

III. The impermanence of human life. "*Passeth away.*" This is true of—

1. *Individuals.* "It is appointed unto men once to die."

2. *Generations.* "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh."

"Fast to the driving winds the marshalled clouds Sweep discontinuous o'er the ethereal plain! Another still upon another crowds, All hastening downwards to their native main. Thus passes o'er through varied life's career Man's fleeting age; the seasons as they fly Snatch from us in their course, year after year, Some sweet connection, some endearing tie.

2. *Man's exposure to suffering.* "*Flesh.*" The body is subject to weariness, infirmity, disease, pain, death.

3. *Man's brief tenure of life.* "*A wind that,*" &c. (1.) *Unsubstantial.* (2.) *Ever-moving.* (3.) *Never returning.*

CONCLUSION.—In the great mercy of God to us, behold—

1. *The grand support of frail humanity.* (Ps. ciii. 13-18.)

2. *The grand hope of sinful humanity,* ver. 38. (Ps. ciii. 3, 4, 8-12.)

The parent, ever honoured, ever dear,
Claims from the filial breast the pious sigh;
A brother's urn demands the kindred tear,
And gentle sorrows gush from friendship's eye.
To-day we frolic in the rosy bloom
Of jocund youth—the morrow knells us to
the tomb."

3. *The race in this world.* The human race will not remain on this earth for ever. The earth as it now is will not continue for ever. The great drama shall be played out, and the theatre shall then be taken down.

IV. The irretrievableness of human life. "*Cometh not again.*" "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return." Man passes hence to "the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns." What an argument have we here for the prompt and faithful discharge of duty! "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might; for there is no," &c. "I must work the works of Him that sent me while," &c. There is no coming back to correct errors or to discharge neglected duties, &c.

V. The grand distinction of human life. *It is remembered by God.* He is interested in it. 1. *He remembers our frailties and sufferings, and pities us.* 2. *Our weakness, and succours us.* 3. *Our capabilities, and saves us.* Here is the glory of human life. God is concerned in it. He is working in it and for it. Through Him man shall

"Re-rise from ruin,
High, holy, happy, stainless as a star,
Imperishable as eternity."

THE INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS.

(Verses 42-53.)

In this paragraph the Psalmist speaks of the plagues with which God visited Egypt, and by means of which Pharaoh and his people were humbled, and the Israelites were delivered from bondage. He does not mention all the plagues, and those which he does mention are not named in the order of their occurrence. The subject is introduced here as affording another illustration of the great sinfulness of the unbelief and rebelliousness of the Hebrews.

I. The instruments by which Divine judgments are inflicted.

1. *He uses their famous river as an instrument of His judgments.* With them the river was the great means of life, and a thing in which they boasted themselves; but God turned all its waters into blood. When purified from slime, those waters were most delicious drink; but now they are most loathsome even to look upon. In this case, the great glory of a people was turned by God into their great curse. He can make our choicest treasures His instruments to scourge us for our sins.

2. *He uses some most despicable creatures as instruments of His judgments.* "Flies, frogs, caterpillars, locusts." The great Pharaoh, with his princes and nobles, were greatly afflicted and tormented by these insignificant creatures. God can make use of the weakest and meanest creatures to bring down the pride of the loftiest princes. What they are deficient in strength, He makes up by increasing their numbers. Terrible plagues they were. No armour could ward off the flies. The frogs came in such shoals as to defy all repressive measures. While caterpillars and locusts came in dense clouds, devouring every green thing.

3. *He uses the elements of nature as instruments of His judgments.* "Hail, frost, lightnings." The laws and forces of nature bow loyally to the Lord. The God of providence is the God of nature also, and when He pleases He

can use nature's elements and forces for the carrying out of His plans. In this case, He sends forth the hail as his scourge. The frost is the minister of His wrath. The lightnings are the executioners of His judgments.

4. *He uses angels as instruments of His judgments.* By the term "*evil angels*" we are to understand not that the angels spoken of were themselves wicked, but angels who were used by God for bringing evil or calamity upon the wicked. The reference is to the angel, or angels, who smote with death all the first-born of the Egyptians. All holy angels come and go at God's command. "Angels that excel in strength, do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." He sends them forth to succour and deliver the righteous, or to smite and destroy the wicked, and they hasten to do His bidding. Thus we see that God can use any and all of His creatures as instruments to carry out His judgments, if He please to do so. He can arm all nature,—air, earth, fire, water—to fight against those who refuse to submit to Him. He can employ all ranks of creatures, from the tiny insect of an hour to the august "angel standing in the sun," as messengers of His wrath. He can arm the universe to fight against the wicked.

II. The method according to which Divine judgments are inflicted. Two features of the Divine method of administering judgment stand prominently forth here.

1. *Gradualness in the severity of the judgments.* Pharaoh must suffer, but God will spare him as much as possible. The sternest judgments are reserved to the last, so that if the proud monarch will obey the commands of God he may escape their infliction. Mark the gradation in the severity of these judgments. First, they suffer privation and annoyance by reason of the water being turned into blood, and the plague of frogs. Then they suffer the irritation and the severe pain of body arising from the

plague of flies and that of boils. Then they suffer the loss and disappointment of seeing the fruit of their labours consumed by caterpillars and locusts. They also saw the trees of their fields and vineyards destroyed by hail, and their flocks and herds first afflicted with a grievous murrain, and afterwards destroyed by hail and lightning. But still God has heavier and more terrible judgments in store. After every plague there is a pause in the storm of the Divine anger to ascertain if Pharaoh will repent and obey God. God has no pleasure in smiting him. But when the former plagues have failed to produce any lasting and salutary impression upon the king, God prepares to inflict the severest stroke of all, to "cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending" His angels to destroy all the first-born of the land of Egypt. And in one dread night all the first-born of the land were slain, "from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the first-born of cattle." The gradualness with which God inflicts His judgments is a proof that even in wrath He remembers mercy. It should also act as a warning to the impenitent not to provoke God to do His worst. He has sharper swords in His armoury than He has as yet drawn against you.

2. *The exemption of the Israelites from the judgments.* When the Egyptians suffered the Lord separated the Israelites from them. From the common sufferings and trials of life the people of God are not exempted; but from the judgments of God they are exempted. When the world was destroyed by the flood, Noah and his family were saved. Before the fiery deluge consumed the cities of the plain, Lot was rescued from them. In the terrible siege and

destruction of Jerusalem it is not known that any Christian perished. So will it be in the final judgment.

III. *The object for which the Divine judgments are inflicted.* The object of the judgments inflicted on Egypt was, at least, threefold—

1. *The humbling of the proud Pharaoh and his advisers.*

2. *The emancipation of Israel from their captivity, &c.*

3. *The carrying out of His own great plan.* The great plan of God, a small portion of which was developed by means of these judgments, stretches far beyond the Egyptians and the Israelites. It embraces all ages and all peoples. The Hebrews occupy a most important position in that plan. "Of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came." God makes all events contribute to the development of His own wise, benevolent, and glorious purposes.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the manifold instruments of Divine judgments lead the stout-hearted sinner to pause and consider.* "If He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered?" 2. *Let the method of Divine judgments, as here exhibited, strengthen our confidence in the righteousness and mercy of God.* He is merciful to tyrants such as Pharaoh. He is righteous and will not in judgment "destroy the righteous with the wicked." 3. *Let us mark well the assurance which this subject gives us of the certainty of the accomplishment of the Divine purposes.* He has engines of judgment wherewith to crush incorrigible rebels. He controls all events for the furtherance of his own vast and sublime designs. In the end evil shall be engulfed as in ocean's depths, and the exultant praise of the good shall resound throughout the universe.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

(Verses 54-64.)

In this portion of the Psalm, as in the previous portions, we have brought be-

fore us the sad sins of the Hebrews, and the great goodness of God in His deal-

ings with them both of mercy and of judgment. We may profitably group the teachings of the paragraph round verses 60 and 61, as a centre, and take as our subject, *The withdrawal of the Divine presence*. When the Israelites had entered upon the possession of Canaan, they set up the tabernacle at Shiloh, where it remained during the period of the Judges. During the administration of Eli, who was at once high priest and judge, the moral condition of Israel grew extremely evil. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were notorious for their wickedness. "The war between the Philistines and Israelites broke out anew. A bloody battle was fought at Aphek, in which the Israelites were totally defeated. They determined to resort to those means of conquest which had proved irresistible under the direction of Joshua. They sent to Shiloh for the Ark, and the Ark was brought forth from its holy place, and was placed in the centre of the camp of Israel. But the days were gone when the rivers dried up, and the walls of cities fell down, and the enemy fled at once, before the symbol of the presence of Israel's God. The measure was unauthorised by the Divine command. . . . The Israelites fought with desperate but unavailing resolution—the iron chariots of the Philistines triumphed. Thirty thousand Israelites perished, and the Ark of God fell into the hands of the uncircumcised—the guilty sons of Eli were slain in its defence. The aged high priest sat by the wayside in dreadful anxiety for the fate of the Ark. A messenger rushed in, bearing the sad intelligence; a wild cry ran through the whole city; the blind old man, now ninety-eight years of age, fell from his seat, broke his neck, and died." (*Vide* 1 Sam. iv.) After seven months the Philistines sent back the Ark, which was placed successively at Nob and at Gibeon, and finally by David on Mount Zion. In our text we are taught that it was in consequence of the sins of the people that the Ark was removed for ever from Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, and was at length placed upon Mount Zion, in the tribe of Judah.

When the Ark was removed by the Philistines the Israelites felt that God had abandoned them, and that their independence and glory had departed for ever.

I. The withdrawal of the Divine presence is invariably preceded by many and aggravated sins.

1. *The sins of Israel were many.* They were guilty of oft-repeated acts of disobedience. "They kept not His testimonies." As they had tempted and provoked God in the wilderness, so also did they in Canaan under the judges. They were guilty of *unfaithfulness* to God. They turned away from God in their hearts and in their lives, no reliance was to be placed upon them, they were untrue even in their most solemn engagements. As a treacherous bow in the hands of the archer fails of its true aim and may occasion disaster, so had they proved in relation to God utterly untrustworthy. They were guilty of *idolatry*. Imitating the idolatrous Canaanites, they had erected altars on high places, and bowed down to graven images. They committed spiritual adultery, and so moved God to jealousy. Can we wonder that God withdrew from them? That they, whom He had chosen as His own people, and called to be the witnesses to the nations of His essential unity, and blessed above all others,—that they should depart from Him unto idols is surely a trumpet-call for the display of His signal displeasure.

2. *The sins of Israel were aggravated.* To estimate their sin aright we must view it in the light of His dealings with them. Look at their disobedience in the light of His great goodness to them, their unfaithfulness in the light of His constant fidelity, their idolatry in the light of His non-abandonment of them notwithstanding their sins, and you will be able to appreciate the greatness of their wickedness which led to His withdrawal from their midst. "God never leaves us till we leave Him, never withdraws till we have driven Him from us." See this in the case of Saul, the king of Israel. Not until he had grieved God by repeated acts of disobedience did God forsake him. See also the case of the

Jews. Notwithstanding extreme provocation God continued to own and bless them, until they had filled up the measure of their iniquity by rejecting and crucifying Him, in the person of His Son. And even then He rejected them with unutterable sorrow and bitter tears. Thus He deals now with *individuals*. He does not desert the temple of the human soul until He is driven thence by inexpugnable depravity. He never says of any one, "let him alone," unless he is hopelessly "joined unto his idols." Thus He deals with *churches* also. Persistent infidelity to duty, truth, and God, will cause Him to depart from any church, leaving it in the darkness of error and evil to sink into dreary nothingness.

II. The withdrawal of the Divine presence is invariably succeeded by many and terrible calamities. In the case of Israel it was followed by—

1. *The loss of power and honour.* The Ark is spoken of by the Psalmist as the strength and glory, or ornament of God. On many occasions it had been a defence and an inspiration to Israel. It was the visible symbol of their distinction and glory as the chosen people of God, among whom He dwelt. When it was captured by their enemies, their inspiration and fortitude were gone, and their glory had suffered a dreary eclipse. Let God abandon a man, and all moral power, all spiritual dignity are gone. Let Him withdraw from a church, and, whatever else may remain, the spiritual life, strength, and glory have all passed away.

2. *Defeat and slaughter in battle.* In the battle of Aphek thirty thousand Israelites were slain. Forsaken by God, they could not stand before their enemies. In our personal spiritual conflicts we are strong only as we are animated by God. If He withdraw from us we shall fall an easy victim to our enemies. In the war of the Church against ignorance and sin she is strong in exact proportion as God is with her. If He desert her, though all her arrangements and offices are perfect in other respects, her victorious life and power are completely gone.

3. *Great social misery.* "The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given to marriage," &c. The young men were slain in battle. The maidens were thus doomed to involuntary maidenhood. They "were not praised" in the songs which were usually sung at marriage celebrations. "Their priests fell by the sword." The reference is to Hophni and Phinehas, who were sinners before the Lord exceedingly, and who were out of place amid the ferocity and carnage of a battle-field. When the priests of God were slain it was regarded as a most severe calamity. "And their widows made no lamentations." Take one case in point. When the wife of Phinehas heard the issue of the battle of Aphek, she "was seized with the pains of premature labour; the women around her endeavoured to console her with the intelligence that she had borne a male child: she paid no attention to their words, and only uttered a passionate exclamation. The pride and exultation of maternal tenderness, the grief for her father-in-law and her husband, were absorbed in a deeper feeling. She said, *The Ark of God is taken*; and she called her child Ichabod, the glory is departed from Israel." Sorrows for personal loss were swallowed up by the great sorrow for the national loss and dishonour. In verses 63 and 64 we thus trace the outlines of a picture of extreme social misery. Let God withdraw from a people, and the greatest social wretchedness must supervene.

Brothers, heed well the message of this subject to you *personally*. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." You have grieved Him much already. Then pray to Him at once—

"Stay, thou insulted Spirit, stay,
Though I have done Thee such despite,
Nor cast the sinner quite away,
Nor take Thine everlasting flight."
—C. Wesley.

Let Christian *churches* also heed the warning voice. "Trust ye not in lying words saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these. . . . But go ye now into my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and

see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." "Repent," ye backsliding churches, "and do your first works," or God may say of you, "Pray

not for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear thee."

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

(Verses 65-72.)

In these verses God in His sovereignty is represented as—

I. Arousing Himself to interpose in human affairs. "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And He smote," &c. He arose,

1. *To smite His enemies.* He had made use of the Philistines to punish His people for their sins; but they were not His servants. Their pride and power were used by Him for the execution of His purposes, but they wist not what they did. And now He arises for their confusion. By raising up and sending forth against them His servant David He rebuked their insolence, curbed their power, and in due time drove them from every portion of the land of Canaan. Nay, more, "He put them to a perpetual reproach;" for, as Hengstenberg remarks, "The *eternal* shame is in accordance with the history. The Philistines went downward step by step, till they disappeared from the scene altogether."

2. *To adjust the affairs of His people.* Though He withdrew from them for a season, He had not cast them off for ever. He again comes to their help, in the manner indicated in the text, and which we shall shortly consider. In the representation which the Psalmist gives of God arousing Himself, as a mighty man refreshed by sleep and wine, and shouting for the battle, there is much that is anthropomorphical and poetical. God never sleeps. His control of human affairs is continuous. His sovereign purposes are ever being developed under His superintendence. His activity is incessant. But there are periods in which His hand is not manifest in human affairs, in which He seems regardless of the interests of His people, as though He slept and knew not the

state of those affairs. His sovereignty is calm, eternal, unchangeable. But its continuity and immutability of operation is not fully manifest to us. Thus, for a time, He appeared to resign His control of the affairs of Israel and to surrender them to their enemies. Now that His hand is again manifest, the poet pictures Him as a mighty warrior arousing from slumber and shouting with joy to do battle with His foes.

II. Rejecting men from the possession of privileges. "He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim." He deposed Ephraim from the priority and supremacy which that tribe had hitherto held. *Why did He so?* This Psalm is a complete answer to the inquiry. Why, except that "they were no longer worthy of holding that position; nay, that they were utterly unworthy. Our Lord, in many instances, represents God as rejecting men, and we believe that in every instance the rejection is because of some fatal flaw in the character of the men rejected. He delights not in rejecting men, but in accepting them.

III. Selecting men to the possession of privileges and the performance of duties. "He chose the tribe of Judah," &c.

1. *He selected Judah to receive the sanctuary.* Ephraim had been tried, and had been found sadly wanting. Now the Lord will try Judah. So that tribe is raised to precedence. Within its territory on Mount Zion the sanctuary was established, and the seat of government placed; and from its people King David was chosen. And this was in accordance with God's sovereign purposes. The supremacy of Judah had been predicted by Jacob long before (Gen. xlix. 8-10). And from that tribe the Messiah was to come forth. God still selects men to be

the recipients of privileges. Some enter upon the work of life with countless advantages, while others enter upon that work burdened and straitened by reason of disadvantages. He still selects nations to privileges, and honours, and responsibilities.

2. *He selected David to become the sovereign.* "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds," &c. Here is a remarkable example of Divine sovereignty. (1.) *God chooses a man of humble position to fill the most exalted position.* "He took him from the sheepfolds," &c. David was not of royal descent, nor was he selected because of his acquaintance with king's courts, or with the arts of kingcraft. "He was bred not a scholar, not a soldier, but a shepherd." He was chosen not for his appearance or position, but for his ability and character. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (2.) *God chooses a man of eminent fitness for the most exalted position.* David was a man of singularly great ability. He was remarkable for strength, courage, endurance, tact, ruling faculty, &c. He was distinguished as a shepherd, warrior, musician, poet, and king. He was a man of approved faithfulness. As a shepherd he was no hireling. He had risked his own life to defend that of some members of his flock. He seems to have been particularly careful of "those that were with young." Having been faithful in his lowly sphere, God raised him to the honours and responsibilities of the most lofty sphere. He was a man of noble character. He is eminent for gentleness, generosity, and self-sacrifice; he was profoundly religious; but for the one black and painful exception, he lived as a man who had set God always before him; he was a man after God's own heart. Thus in His sovereignty God selected the fittest instrument for the great work. He can use the most incompetent instrument for the most important task. But such is not His rule of action. In calling men to important posts, He selects for each post him who is most adapted for it. God's sovereignty is a thing of infinite

wisdom. He does not choose the most ignorant and incapable man for the greatest mission (as some men seem to hold and certainly preach), but the greatest and godliest. He can employ the feeblest intelligence. And He calls the man of scholarship, and genius, and heroism, and faith, and power, to consecrate himself thoroughly to His service.

IV. *Establishing a beneficent institution.* "He built His sanctuary like high," &c. We have here the ideas of *prominence* and *stability*. "Palaces" is supplied by the translators. The tabernacle, and afterwards the temple, was the most conspicuous and important thing in the land. Its services appealed to all that was tender, true, and noble in their nature; its ministrations were fitted to help them to attain to strength and beauty of character. Those institutions which contribute to our right spiritual development are of all others the most valuable and beneficent. God established His sanctuary there. It was not to be removed as it was from Shiloh. It was to be a permanent institution, and permanent there. So it continued. The tabernacle gave place to its magnificent successor the temple, which remained with varying fortunes until its mission was accomplished, and then the local Jewish temple made way for the universal Christian Church.

V. *Resulting in human advantage.* The reign of the divinely elected king was an inestimable benefit to Israel. "He fed them according to the integrity of His heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of His hands." His administration was pure and upright, wise and beneficent. During his reign the kingdom attained to a rank among nations and to a height of prosperity altogether unknown, if not unimagined, hitherto. In choosing a king for them, God's sovereignty was the people's prosperity.

From this rapid glance at these illustrations of the sovereignty of God, we learn—1. *That God's sovereignty is not capriciously or unreasonably arbitrary, but a thing of the highest reason and wisdom.* 2. *God's sovereignty is not*

weak and changeful, but eternally and immutably great and good. 3. God's sovereignty is not tyrannical, but in perfect accordance with man's entire moral freedom. 4. God's sovereignty is not malevolent or maleficent, but benevolent

and beneficent in the highest degree. In one word, it is the sovereignty of GOD, the supremely Wise and Good. "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

THE CALLING OF DAVID.

(Verses 70, 71.)

I. David's Calling. Two questions present themselves. 1. *How was David's shepherd life an unconscious preparation for his calling?* and 2. *How did the Divine summons, when it came, fit him for his mighty destiny?* Observe—He was sent back to his flocks. Nothing could train him more perfectly than that waiting. Two great convictions awakened in him then that formed in him elements of

strength. (1.) *The belief in a Divine leader* (see Psalm xxiii.) (2.) *The belief in a Divine choice.*

II. Its modern lessons. 1. *There is a Divine plan in every life.* 2. *There is a Divine vocation for every man.* 3. *There is a Divine Shepherd for every man.*—E. L. HULL, in *The Treasury of David*.

PSALM LXXIX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm of Asaph." See Introduction to Psalm lxxiv.

Occasion.—This Psalm is closely related to the lxxvth, and both most probably refer to the devastation and desecration wrought by the Chaldeans.

A SORROWFUL COMPLAINT, AN EARNEST PRAYER, AND A DEVOUT RESOLUTION.

I. A sorrowful complaint. The Psalmist complains—

1. *Of the devastation of Jerusalem, and especially of the desecration of the temple.* "O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps." The reference is to the havoc wrought by Nebuchadnezzar and his army. The strongholds of the city were cast down; the palace of Solomon, the temple of God, with all its courts, its roofs of cedar and of gold, were levelled to the earth, or committed to the flames; the sacred vessels, the ark of the covenant itself, with the cherubim, were pillaged by profane hands. (See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 18, 19.) Great, indeed, must have been the distress of those Jews who were religious and patriotic. Their distress must have been the

more keen by reason of their knowledge that the heathen could never have laid Jerusalem in ruins and desecrated the temple of God, had not the chosen people themselves first desecrated that holy place. (See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14–21.) Their continued pursuit of evil, notwithstanding the earnest remonstrances of God by His prophets, led Him to abandon them for a time to their foes.

2. *Of the cruelties inflicted upon the people of God.* "The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them." Here is a picture of wide-spread slaughter and misery. The words of the poet are a graphic commentary on the brief state-

ment of the inspired chronicler. (See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17.) The bloodshed was great and terrible. Men were slain without compunction, and their conquerors hastened away with their captives, leaving the dead bodies to be devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey.

3. *Of the reproaches cast upon the people of God.* "We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us." They were treated by surrounding peoples as unworthy of respect, and were derided by them as a people vanquished by their foes and forsaken by their God. They were conquered, were made captives, and in their subjection were despised and reproached. They had great reason for sorrowful complaint. Their sorest grief must have sprung from their knowledge of the fact that their own sins caused their sufferings. The intense sorrow of the pious and patriotic amongst them may be known by considering the plaintive mournings of the prophet Jeremiah. "Never did city suffer a more miserable fate, never was ruined city lamented in language so exquisitely pathetic." *Vide The Lamentations.*

II. **An earnest prayer.** The Psalmist in his prayer—

1. *Manifests a consciousness of the sins of the people.* The inquiries, "Wilt Thou be angry for ever? Shall Thy jealousy burn like fire?" imply on the part of the inquirer the consciousness that there had been human provocations, that there had been a cause for God's anger and jealousy. In the Scriptures, idolatry, of which they had been greatly guilty, is represented as spiritual adultery. God was not jealous without reason. And their manifold sins had aroused His anger against them. The Psalmist is right, God was angry with them on account of their sins, and their conquered and captive and suffering state was a sign of His anger.

2. *Petitions God for various favours for His people.* Here is a prayer for pardon. "O remember not against us the iniquities of them that were before us: and purge away our sins." The

effects of sin frequently descend from one generation to another. God declared Himself a "jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate" Him. As a matter of fact men do suffer in many ways from the sins of their ancestors. Prayer is here offered that God would remove from them the judgment of the sins of them that had gone before them; that they might not suffer by reason of them any more. Prayer is offered for the forgiveness of their own sins. "Purge away our sins." Cleanse us from our transgressions, and from all impurity of soul. It is well when the soul in trouble cries out not for the removal of the suffering alone, but for the removal of the sin also. To those who sincerely seek Him, God is ever ready to grant pardon and purity. Here is a prayer for *speedy help and deliverance*. "Let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name; and deliver us for Thy name's sake." As sinners their hope is in the mercy of God. There is great beauty and force in the phrase, "*tender mercies*." It comes from the religious heart, and appeals to the heart. To the tender mercy of the Lord His unworthy and afflicted people look for help. The captive Jews were beyond the aid of human resources. In man they could find no adequate assistance. So they directed their prayer to Him who is equal to the utmost need of His people, and who if He pleased could help them, and deliver them from their enemies. They prayed God to come quickly to their aid; that His "*tender mercies*" might "*speedily prevent*" them. Prevent does not signify hinder, but anticipate. "God's mercy must anticipate, '*come to meet*,' man's necessity." They felt that if God did not speedily interpose for them their utter ruin must be the result. Their salvation depended upon Him, and upon His prompt interposition on their behalf. Here is a prayer *on behalf of the captive and the dying*. "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before Thee; according to the

greatness of Thy power preserve Thou those that are appointed to die." Whether the whole of the people are thus spoken of, or the terms "prisoner" and "appointed to die" are to be taken literally, cannot, we think, be determined. In either case there is an appeal made to the Divine *compassion*; that God would graciously regard "the sighing of those that are bound." And to the Divine *strength*; that He would by the greatness of His energy save from death those who were appointed thereunto. Here is a prayer for *judgment*. "Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known Thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon Thy name. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Let Him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of Thy servants which is shed. And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom, wherewith They have reproached Thee, O Lord." We are by no means sure that the spirit expressed in these petitions is a commendable one. The verses certainly require a great deal of explanation when viewed in the light of the teachings, life, and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps, however, it is illogical and unfair to view them in that light. If the petitions in the text are simply a prayer for justice, then are they right, and such as may fitly be presented at the throne of grace. If the strong desire was that God would assert His own presence and power and glory before the heathen who said, "Where is their God?" then the desire is commendable. The time came when He did interpose in judgment. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom."

3. *Urges his petition with powerful pleas.* On two grounds the Psalmist urges his prayer. He pleads the *greatness and urgency of the people's need*. "We are brought very low." Their affliction and helplessness was an appeal to His pity. Their numbers were diminished, their condition was deplorable; if He did not quickly come to

their aid they would be utterly undone. He pleads *the glory of the Divine name*. "For the glory of Thy name; . . . for Thy name's sake." The idea is, that as they were His redeemed people, His professed people, His honour was involved in the question of their salvation or their destruction. There is no plea so mighty with God as that of His own honour, when it is sincerely urged. If He left them to perish, the heathen would say that He could not or would not save them. If He delivered them, the mockers would be silenced, and His name would be feared. In ancient time God had proclaimed His name to Moses, and there is in this plea, probably, an allusion to that proclamation. If so, there is an appeal to His faithfulness, that He would maintain that name.

III. A devout resolution. "So we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever: we will show forth Thy praise to all generations." This is the language of—

1. *Confidence.* With assured faith they looked forward to the salvation of God. They anticipated deliverance and blessing.

2. *Gratitude.* With thankful hearts they would ascribe unto Him the praise and glory of their redemption. And they would transmit the story of His wondrous doings on their behalf to coming generations, that they also might praise Him.

3. *Service.* It is implied here that they would no more turn aside to idols or decline from His ways, but would serve Him with glad and grateful hearts.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Blessed are they who, having tasted that He is gracious, have not by sin exiled themselves from God's favour and fellowship.* Brethren, prize your blessedness. "Walk in the light, as He is in the light," so shall your path be cheered by His presence and conduct you to His throne. 2. *Let those who have departed from God return unto Him with earnest prayer and devout resolution.* Your hope is in the tender mercy of the Lord. (See Jer. iii. 12, 22.)

PROFANE INTRUDERS IN SACRED PLACES.

(Verse 1.)

"The holy land, the holy house, and the holy city were all polluted by the uncircumcised." We have in this an illustration of what is taking place in this day—

I. In Christian churches. The Church is God's "*inheritance*." "The Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." The Church is the abode of God, His "*temple*." He dwells in it by His Spirit. Desecrating intruders have entered into it. 1. *Ritualism*. Forms, ceremonies, genuflexions, pictures, symbols, instead of the worship of God "in spirit and in truth." Superstition instead of faith. Sacraments instead of the living, personal Saviour. 2. *Rationalism*. Human philosophies instead of the Gospel of Christ. Theories of self-culture instead of the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. 3. *Selfish religionism*. The church is desecrated by men who are religious that they might escape a coarse, materialistic hell, and gain an inglorious and vulgar heaven. Their spiritual state is the very opposite of that expressed in Xavier's beautiful hymn—

"My God, I love Thee, not because
I hope for heaven thereby;" &c.

But the spirit which should animate our churches is not that "of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The Christian spirit is not self-seeking, but self-sacrificing.

II. In human spirits. The human spirit is the "*inheritance*" of God, which He has redeemed. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." The human spirit is also the "*temple*" of God. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" What

intruders have defiled and desecrated this temple? Worldliness, carnality, selfishness, hatred, impurity, have defiled God's holy temple. The human soul has too often resembled a "whited sepulchre" or "a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" rather than the dwelling-place of God. Even amongst religious men there are some in whose soul a human formula or creed has usurped the place of God; they are theologians, not Christians. There are others in whose soul some ecclesiastical system has usurped the place of God; they are more devoted to "*the church*," or to "*our denomination*," or to "*our body*," than to the Lord of all.

These desecrating intruders must be expelled from the Church, or they will lay it in ruins. These unholy spirits that have entered the human soul must be cast out, or that "temple of God" will become a "synagogue of Satan."

On the contrast exhibited in this verse and verse 55 of the preceding Psalm a useful discourse might be made. Subject,—What God does for man, and what man does for God. I. God casts out the heathen for His people, His people by their sins admit the heathen to destroy His city. II. God gave to His people an inheritance, His people suffer His inheritance to be invaded by foes. III. God provided dwelling-places for His people, His people defiled His dwelling-place, and allowed others to defile it also, &c. Or the contrast might be exhibited thus,—

I. God's faithfulness, man's unfaithfulness.

II. God's goodness, man's ingratitude.

III. God's conquering power, man's cowardly weakness, &c.

A MODEL PRAYER.

(Verse 9.)

I. The Person addressed. "O God of our salvation." "Our God, even when He is most severely angry, is not

the God of destruction, but of salvation." 1. God was their *only* Saviour. They were brought so very low as to be be-

yond the help of all others. 2. God was their *sufficient* Saviour. He who delivered their fathers from the Egyptians could deliver them from the Chaldeans.

II. The Prayer offered. Three requests they make to God. 1. For *Pardon*. "Purge away our sins." 2. For *Deliverance*. "Deliver us" from our afflictions, from our enemies. 3. For *Assistance*. "Help us" to bear our troubles, to serve Thee in our lives.

III. The plea urged. "For the glory of Thy name, . . . for Thy name's sake." The honour of His name would be affected by His treatment of their prayer. If He did not deliver them, the heathen would say that He could not or

would not help them. If He delivered them, the display of His mercy would excite admiration, the exhibition of His power would beget awe. His name would be feared. "The choicest mercies God's people have are for His name's sake: they have pardon of sin for His name's sake" (Ps. xxv. 11; 1 John ii. 12); "purging of sin for His name's sake; leading in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. xxiii. 3); "quickening of their dead and dull hearts for His name's sake" (Ps. cxliii. 11). "Though His people offend Him, yet He forsakes them not, for His great name's sake."

Let us ask for spiritual blessings of God, urging in faith this plea, and we shall receive, and our joy will be full.

THE AFFLICTIONS OF MAN AND THE HELP OF GOD.

(Verse 11.)

The prisoners are those of the Hebrews who were in bondage and suffering. "Those that are appointed to die might apply to those who were condemned to death; or to those who were sick and in danger of death; or to those who were prisoners and captives, and who were, by their sufferings, exposed to death."

I. The afflictions of man. "The prisoner, . . . those that are appointed to die." To be a prisoner is to be deprived of light, of liberty, &c. How many and varied are the afflictions of man. The sighs and cries of the suffering are ever arising from our world.

"Each new morn
New widows howl; new orphans cry; new
sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
Like syllable of dolour."—*Shakespeare*.

II. The help of God. It is His "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." As a helper He is—1. *Quick to hear*. The sigh of a prisoner in the dungeon reaches His ear in an instant. 2. *Strong to save*. "The greatness of Thy power." His energy is more than equal to the extremest human need. And His tenderness is as great as His strength.

III. The connecting link between the two. Prayer is the means whereby suffering man obtains the help of God. Prayer implies in the suppliant felt need and faith in God. To the ear of God a sigh may be a devout and earnest prayer.

Let distressed and dying men direct their sighs to God and obtain relief.

PSALM LXXX.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim-Eduth." On "*Shoshannim*" see Introduction to Ps. xlv. Probably "*Shoshannim-Eduth*" denotes "the melody or air 'after' or 'in the manner of' which the Psalm was to be sung. As the words now stand they signify 'lilies, a testimony,' and the two are separated by a large distinctive accent. In themselves they have no meaning in the present text, and must therefore be regarded as probably a fragment of the beginning of an older Psalm with which the choir were familiar."—*Smith's Dict. of the Bible*.

"*A Psalm of Asaph.*" See Introduction to Ps. lxxiv. Perowne: "As in the case of most of the historical Psalms, so in the case of this, it is impossible to say with certainty at what period it was written. The allusions are never sufficiently definite to lead to any positive conclusion. . . . All that is certain is, that the time was a time of great disaster, that the nation was trampled down under the foot of foreign invaders. The poet turns to God with the earnest and repeated prayer for deliverance, and bases his appeal on the past."

THE DIVINE FAVOUR IMploRED.

(Verses 1-7.)

In these verses the poet complains of the sorrowful condition of the people, and prays for salvation from God. Their sad condition he regards as the result of the withdrawal of the favour of God, and he prays for their salvation by the renewal of that favour. The Psalmist represents the people as—

I. Sorely needing God's favour. The sad condition of the people appears from—

1. *The reproaches of their neighbours.* "Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours; and our enemies laugh among themselves." "The neighbours are always the petty tribes in the immediate neighbourhood of Israel, who continually availed themselves of those occasions when Israel was oppressed by more powerful nations, to give vent to their hatred." These neighbours strove among themselves as to who should obtain most of the spoils of Israel, and who should be bitterest in their reproaches against them. When a people who have occupied a position of eminence and power are derided by petty neighbours they must have fallen very low, and great must be their sorrow as they realise the painful contrast between their present and their past. They who "laugh among themselves" over a fallen and suffering foe must have sunk very low in the scale of humanity. Yet their jeers may torment the sufferers to whom they are directed, may make their bitter drink more bitter, and their heavy burden more heavy.

2. *The rejection of their prayer.* "O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?" The marginal reading gives a literal translation, "How long wilt Thou smoke against the prayer of Thy people?" The smoke of incense was a

symbol of prayer amongst the Hebrews. "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." According to the teaching of their Scriptures the smoke of the incense in prayer would propitiate God, and cause the smoke of His anger to cease. But instead of this the smoke of His anger opposes the smoke of the incense of their prayers. Such seems to be the poetic dress of the idea. The idea itself is that God rejected their prayer. If such were really the case there must have been something wrong in their prayers, or in the spirit in which they presented them. They must have "asked amiss." (1.) There might have been a lack of fervour and earnestness in their prayers. God does not regard cold, half-hearted petitions. (2.) Or they might have supplicated Him from an impure or unworthy motive. (3.) Or, while they sought Him in prayer, they might have cherished sin in their hearts. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." (4.) Or, probably, God only appeared as though He rejected their prayer. He delayed His response in order to increase His blessing. By making them wait He would test and increase their faith, and the fervour of their desires, and the earnestness of their prayers. But to them He seemed as though He rejected their prayers; and it was a sore trial to them. Men reproached them, and God rejected their entreaties. Earth greeted them with cruel persecution or scornful laughter, and heaven with stony-hearted indifference or stern rejection.

3. *The greatness of their sorrow.* "Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure." God dealt out sorrows to them as though they were their food

and drink. Their grief was intense and constant. Tears were their daily portion. All their trials and sorrows they regarded as proceeding from God. "*Thou feedest them with the bread of tears.*" "*Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours,*" &c. In this they were certainly right thus far, that God had allowed these miseries to befall them. If He had not directly brought them upon them as a chastisement for their sins, He had withdrawn the shield of His protection from them because of their sin. He had hidden His face from them, and they were troubled. He had withdrawn His favour, and innumerable evils had compassed them about. Truly His favour was sorely needed by them.

II. Earnestly imploring God's favour. In the prayer here recorded we have—

1. *An implied confession of sin.* "Turn us again, O God." They are conscious of having turned aside into sinful ways. In them there had been an evil heart of unbelief, and they had departed from God, and were now feeling the bitter result. They had withdrawn their loyalty from Him before He withdrew His favour from them. And they humbly and repeatedly pray, "Turn us again, O God." When sin is mourned over and confessed to God, and restoration to fidelity and righteousness is sought from Him, the return of His favour will not tarry long.

2. *A recognition of the gracious relation of God to them.* (1.) God is addressed as their *Shepherd*. This relation is one of great intimacy and tenderness. It involves His *guidance, protection, and provision.* (See *Hom. Com.* on Ps. lxxiv. 1.) (2.) God is addressed as *dwelling between the cherubim*. The allusion is to the Shecinah, the visible symbol of the Divine presence, which was above the mercy-seat and between the cherubim. From the mercy-seat He communed with man and dispensed His favour. There He had manifested Himself to the Hebrews as He had to no other people. In this address to Him they remind Him of this special favour shown to them, and seek to en-

courage themselves thereby. Jesus Christ is the true Shecinah. He is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person."

3. *An earnest entreaty for His salvation.* "Give ear, shine forth, stir up Thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

(1.) They pray that God would *attend to them.* "Give ear." He had seemed to disregard their cries to Him, and even to reject their prayers in His anger; and they entreat Him to lend an attentive ear to the voice of their supplications. (2.) They pray that God would *arouse His strength for their salvation.* For a time it seemed as though His mighty saving arm had slumbered. They knew how mightily that arm had wrought salvation for their fathers in ancient days, and they cried, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." (3.) They pray that God would *manifest His favour to them and so save them.* "Cause Thy face to shine" is a poetical expression of, Show Thy favour. They felt that in His favour was their salvation. At the rebuke of His countenance they perished; in the shining of His countenance they lived and rejoiced. The idea is poetical and beautiful, and profoundly true. "In His favour is life." Only as our being is illumined and warmed by the beams of His love do we live. His favour is the life-giving breath of souls.

In conclusion, Is this favour ours? Are we living in the smile of God? Then, let us never cause Him to avert His face from us. Let us yield to the mighty attraction of His love, and be transformed into His ineffable beauty. But if any have no consciousness of His favour, no saving acquaintance with Him, let them at once pray, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us." "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Rise through faith in Him into the conscious realisation of the favour of God, and so into the possession of a life spiritual, everlasting, blessed, and Divine.

THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL.

Verse 1. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest," &c. To the great majority of devout souls, next to the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the revelation of Him in His various offices and relationships is the most precious. Here He is set forth as the Shepherd of His people.

I. The relation which He sustains to His people. "*Shepherd.*" Certain relationships He sustains to all men. Creator, Sustainer, Sovereign, Judge. Certain other relationships He sustains only to those who confide in Him, relationships which involve trust and sympathy. Such is that of Shepherd. "*Shepherd of Israel,*" not of Philistia or Assyria. He is the Shepherd now of those who know Him, trust Him, follow Him. Very intimate and tender is the relation between Eastern shepherds and their flocks.

1. *Each sheep is individually known.* "He calleth His own sheep by name."

2. *Each sheep is individually cared for.* "He shall gather the lambs with his arm," &c.

3. *Each sheep is individually protected.* "The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep."

4. *Each sheep is individually provided for.* "The Lord will give grace and glory: no good will He withhold," &c. And, in conjunction with this personal knowledge and care of the Shepherd for each individual member of His flock, there is *unity of the whole*. They constitute a flock.

II. The service which He renders to His people. "*Leadest* Joseph like a flock." This is only a development of the previous clause. The Eastern shepherd goes before his flock, and the sheep follow him. The Lord leads His people. By the exercise of their reason and conscience; by the openings and closings of His providence; by the teachings of His holy Word; and by the action of His holy Spirit upon the heart, He now leads all who trust in Him. Ponder what is involved in this.

1. *That man is not competent to arrange his own course of life.* "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

2. *That man is not compelled to yield to the Divine direction.* The good Shepherd does not drive men before Him as unwilling disciples, but He goes before them, leads them, leaving them to follow Him or forsake Him as they choose.

3. *That the Divine direction of human life is exercised in the most gracious manner.* "I will go before thee and make the crooked places straight." The Shepherd first encounters every difficulty or danger, then the sheep follow Him. This Divine guidance is a fact to-day, a blessed reality which we may each prove by committing our way unto the Lord.

III. The manifestation of Himself to His people. "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim." "Thou who sittest enthroned upon the cherubim." It has been thought that the prayer for help in the first part of the verse rests upon the shepherd care of God, and in this part on the omnipotence of Him who is enthroned upon the cherubim, and ruleth over all. What the symbol of the Divine presence was to the Jews, the Lord Jesus Christ is to us. He is the Divine Representative, the Revealer of God. In Him we meet with God, and read His character, and see His mercy, and learn His grace. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Through Him God dispenses His favours. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you."

IV. The great Desire of His people from Him. "*Shine forth.*" "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." "Their own arm did not save them, but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance." "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us."

The idea is that in the manifestation of God's favour, salvation and blessing are to be found.

So is it now and for us. Our great

need is that God in Christ would shine forth unto us. To see God in Christ Jesus is a saving, spiritually transforming sight.

SALVATION IN GOD'S SMILE.

(Verse 3.)

The thrice-uttered prayer, "Turn us again, O God," seems to show that the Hebrews were sensible of departure from God, and desirous of being turned penitently to Him as a means of regaining His favour. There is, we fear, much backsliding of heart in the Church at this time. What we mean by backsliding. The loss of the intense consciousness of peace and joy which followed conversion, and of the burning enthusiasm and zeal, which things were then irregular and spasmodic, is not always to be regretted. If our consciousness of peace and joy have grown profounder and calmer, though less intense; if our enthusiasm and zeal have grown into a habit of regular, steady, and self-denying work for God, there is no matter for regret. We do not mourn the loss of the sapling in the oak, or of the little child in the man or woman. Such loss is really development and gain. But there are many signs of real spiritual decline in many persons in the great Church of Christ. Absorption in business has benumbed the zeal of many. Marriage and the cares of domestic life have taken the lofty aspiration out of many others, and ended their usefulness. Worldly prosperity has injured others. There are thousands in the Church the promise of whose early discipleship remains unfulfilled. They are members of the Church; but the zeal, enthusiasm, usefulness, consecration, and joy of their early Christian life—where are they? Ah, where? To such persons God very often sends trouble, in some form or other, as His messenger to recall them from their backslidings. Is He so sending to any of you? Or has He so sent to you? Then, be thankful that He is still seeking you; and make the prayer of the text your own. "Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine," &c.

The Poet's idea of salvation and its attainment is, that it is a something which springs out of the shining of God's countenance, and which is to be sought by prayer. "Cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved. . . . They perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance." "In His favour is life." Probably he was thinking of the shining of the sun. It gives life, light, warmth, exhilaration. Its absence means death; its presence, life and gladness. Taking this analogy, the view of salvation here set forth is that *it consists in the life and growth of the soul under the favour of God*. It is not mere deliverance from wrath or hell, as commonly understood. The poet's idea of hell is given here—"The rebuke of Thy countenance." He seeks salvation by seeking the blessing which is exactly antithetic to that evil, "The light of Thy countenance." All spirits must sustain some relation to God. Spiritual existence in total separation from Him is an impossibility. But spirits are found in various and different relations to Him. Some are avowedly *hostile* to Him. Devils are of this class. They are sustained by Him, but they are bitterly antagonistic to Him. Many men too are "alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works." Hostile to Him actually, though not avowedly. In this state all true spiritual growth is impossible. Others are *indifferent* to Him, practically "without God in the world," and have no desire to be otherwise. Such indifference involves indifference to their own spirit. There can be no true spiritual growth in such a state. Others have some sort of belief in His existence, but *despair* of obtaining His favour. They cannot grow spiritually, for hope is essential to growth. Others are *trusting and loving* Him. They regard Him as merciful and gracious, wise and beneficent, strong

and kind; and so they trust Him and enjoy His favour. The position of the Psalmist I take to be this, that all in this state, or sustaining this attitude towards God, are being saved, and that by the growth of their souls under the influence of God's favour. Under this influence, in what would souls grow?

1. *In thoughtfulness.* God is infinitely thoughtful. He frequently calls upon men to "consider," "reason," be "wise," &c. Every soul that is fully open to His influence He quickens into holy thoughtfulness.

2. *In holy principles.* Living in the light of God's countenance, the principles of the Divine administration and conduct become ours.

3. *In spiritual strength to will and do and suffer.* The sense of His loving presence makes the will imperial in the right, the hands strong for holy doing, and the heart calm and patient in suffering.

4. *In reverence.* "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (See also Isa. vi. 1-5.)

5. *In spiritual beauty.* "The beauty of the Lord our God upon us." In one word, under God's smile the soul grows into His image. According to our interpretation of the text, that is salvation. How *philosophic!* How *true!* How *exalted!* We may secure His favour by earnest, persistent prayer (see verses 3, 7, 19). Mark the cumulation of names. Such prayer is the approach of the soul to God. Apply the subject—

1. *To backsliders.* 2. *To the unconverted.*

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

PASSAGES FROM THE HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH, WITH THEIR LESSONS TO THE MODERN CHURCH.

(Verses 8-19.)

Israel is here compared to a vine, and under this figure some experiences of her history are referred to. A devout and thoughtful study of these verses will not fail in discovering teachings which are applicable to us to-day, without resorting to any fanciful or irreverent handling of the Book of God. The verses bring before us—

I. The Divine planting of the ancient Church. In respect to the ancient Jewish Church the Lord is represented here as—

1. *Bringing them out of Egypt.* "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt." Israel in Egypt was like a vine in an unfavourable situation, with an unsuitable soil and an ungenial clime. If it grew and bore fruit there, it was not by the aid of its circumstances, but in despite of them. So the Lord God of hosts brought forth His people from their uncongenial circumstances and surroundings, like a vine from an unfriendly soil and an inclement air.

2. *Expelling the heathen from the promised land.* He had chosen that land for His own people, and promised it to their fathers, and He fulfils His promise. He had long purposed to plant His vine in that goodly land. And, in order to the accomplishment of His purpose, He "cast out the heathen." Seven nations were rooted out to make room for this vine which the Lord had chosen.

3. *Firmly planting His people in a goodly situation.* Having prepared room for it by the expulsion of the heathen, He "planted it, and caused it to take deep root." In fertile soil, refreshed by "brooks of water, fountains, and depths that spring out of valleys and hills," beneath translucent skies and amid genial airs, He planted His vine, and caused it firmly to strike its roots. Thus the ancient Jewish Church was emancipated from the bondage of Egypt, enabled to conquer the Canaanites, and to take secure possession of the land which God had promised to their fathers,

entirely by means of His power. So much so that, with the strictest truth, He may be said to have delivered them from Egypt, vanquished their enemies, and planted them in Canaan. *So now the Lord calls men out of the moral Egypt*, with its bondage of evil habits, its degrading fleshly lusts, its oppressive burdens of guilt, and its cruel task-masters of lordly passions. At His girdle hangs the key which unlocks the doors of the prison in which the captives of sin are immured. He breaks the power of the oppressor. "The Lord looseth the prisoners." He is the great Emancipator from the guilt and sovereignty of evil. All who listen to His call and accept His deliverance, He makes to rejoice in glad liberty. He not only calls men out of Egypt, but *also plants in His own vineyard all those who obey His call*. In what favourable circumstances the Lord has planted us! How many culturing agencies He is causing to operate upon us! What innumerable aids to growth and development, strength and maturity, fruitfulness and beauty, He is ever bestowing upon us! The Church of God in Britain to-day is "exalted to heaven" with privileges.

II. The great progress of the ancient Church. "It filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the goodly cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." The hills or mountains which were shadowed by this vine were probably those in the extreme south of Canaan. And as the vine when planted in fertile soil runs up the trees and covers them, so the poet pictures this vine as running up and covering the great cedars of Lebanon. "The sea" is the Mediterranean, which bounded the Promised Land on one side; "the river" is the Euphrates, which bounded the land on the other side. The whole is a beautiful picture of the prosperity of the Hebrews in their best days. During the latter portion of the reign of David, and through almost the whole of that of Solomon, they occupied a proud position amongst neighbouring nations; their power was recognised and respected; their pros-

perity was great; their wealth also was great. So the Christian Church has spread, and is still spreading. Its institutions and literature are spreading and growing in almost every part of the known world. Rank and fashion, wealth and power, education and genius, are to be found in large proportions within her fold. Her financial resources for carrying on her work are greater than they ever were, and are still increasing. The greatest institutions are overshadowed by her. Her roots seem to be ever striking deeper; and her branches are spreading and growing in every direction.

III. The ruinous failure of the ancient Church. This vine rose to a great height, spread abroad its branches to a great extent, was well covered with foliage, so that it cast a great and deep shadow; but *not a word is said of its fruit*. It bore no fruit. It failed in its chief end. Of what use is a vine unless it bring forth fruit? If it fail in that it fails in the main thing. And it was in the main thing that the Hebrews failed. Israel was a fruitless vine. As their material prosperity increased, their religious faithfulness and zeal decreased. In the Holy Land idolatry was permitted by Solomon. He even allowed a part of one of the hills overlooking Jerusalem, and almost fronting the temple of God, to be consecrated to obscene and barbarous deities. Can we wonder that "clouds on all sides gathered about his declining day"? Is it surprising that he should "bequeath to his heir an insecure throne, a discontented people, formidable enemies on the frontiers," and the probability of a contested succession? Let the Church of Christ to-day take warning from the ancient Jewish Church. God demands fruit of us, the fruit of personal holiness and social usefulness. Is the Church meeting that demand? Is she holy in herself? Is she abolishing the dishonesties of trade? Is her face set against human oppression? Is she striving to purify the land of the scandalous social corruptions? Is she waging war against drunkenness and gluttony? Is she leading the lost to the Saviour? O Church of Christ, examine thyself!

IV. The mournful devastation of the ancient Church. "Why hast Thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they that pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. . . . It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance." We cannot determine what particular calamities are referred to in these verses. But notice—

1. *God withdrew His defence from them.* He "broke down her hedges." They had lost their defence by reason of their sin. They had forsaken their Protector, and so exposed themselves to their foes. They had provoked God to anger, and He had left them like a vineyard with its fences demolished, open to the foot of every intruder.

2. *Their enemies ravaged them.* The picture of the havoc and ruin wrought is striking and powerful. *Their enemies are represented as various, fierce, and strong.* "They which pass by the way, the boar out of the wood, and the wild beast of the field." They would waste the vineyard in different ways, and what one failed to destroy would speedily be ruined by the others. *The devastation is represented as very great.* They are being "plucked, wasted, devoured, burned," and are "perishing." Alas, poor vineyard! Desolation itself could scarce be more desolate; or ruin more ruinous. *Their misery is represented as the result of the displeasure of God.* "They perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance." Conscience speaks here, and speaks truly. They were powerless and defenceless before their enemies, because they were conscious of having forsaken their Almighty Friend. The consciousness of sin led them to see a frowning God, and emptied their spirit of courage and their arm of strength.

3. *They failed to understand fully the reason of their miseries.* "Why hast Thou broken?" &c. One would have thought that they would not have needed to ask "why." Did they think that, having shown so much favour to this vine, and bestowed upon it so much care, it was strange that He should

leave it exposed to destroyers? But that very favour and that care only made its worthlessness the more manifest in bearing no fruit. God's great mercies to the Jews made their sin and rebellion against Him the more heinous and aggravated. Instead of asking God why He had left them defenceless, they would have done well to have looked into their own life and conduct, and turned to Him in sincere penitence. Let the Christian Church heed the warning.

V. The earnest prayer of the ancient Church. The poet prays—

1. *For the Divine presence and favour.* "Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine." That God would see and consider their sad case, that He would look upon them with favour, that He would visit them in mercy, is their appropriate desire.

2. *For the Divine protection.* "Guard what Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that Thou madest strong for Thyself." This is a prayer for the defence of God that they may not be utterly and entirely destroyed. The petition refers to His ancient kindness in their planting and increase, and pleads their relation to Him. The vine was planted by Him and for Him, and in its misery and desolation the poet commits it to Him.

3. *For the Divine blessing on their leaders.* "Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." The expositors differ in their interpretations of this verse. Some see with clearness, and assert with confidence, that there is "an outlook to the Messiah here;" while others are unable to see anything of the kind. "The man of Thy right hand" is the man who holds the place of honour. "The son of man," we regard as a poetical variation from the term "man" in the first clause of the verse. "Whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself," i.e., whom Thou hast raised to power for the carrying out of Thy purposes. So we regard it as a prayer on behalf of some leader or leaders of the people, that God's hand may be upon him, or upon them,

for good; and that through him, or them, He would bless the afflicted people.

4. *For the Divine restoration or revival.* "Quicken us." Restore to us as a people vitality and power; our languishing and dying cause do Thou revive and strengthen. Such is the prayer of the ancient Church in its distress. And if any portion of the Lord's vineyard to-day is lying desolate and distressed, Christians will do well to carry the case to God in prayer, and seek His interposition and salvation.

VI. *The devout promise of the ancient Church.* The poet on behalf of the people engages that if God granted their requests, their conduct towards Him should be marked by—

1. *Perseverance.* "So will not we go back from Thee." They had backslidden from His ways many times; but now they vow that, if God will deliver them from their distresses, they will cleave with constancy to Him.

2. *Praise.* "We will call upon Thy name." We will worship Thee faithfully. Such is their promise made in affliction. And we know with how deplorable a frequency such promises are forgotten when the affliction is removed. Such was the case repeatedly in the history of the Jews.

CONCLUSION. — 1. *Let individual Christians and Christian churches take heed to this beacon.* As individuals, "have we our fruit unto holiness"? In the ancient Jewish Church, we have a striking analogue of the planting, privileges, and progress of the Christian Church. Let us see to it that the analogy does not become true as regards fruitlessness; for, if it should, our defence will be gone, and we shall be wasted and destroyed by our enemies. 2. *If any have backslidden from the ways of the Lord, let them seek Him at once in penitence and by prayer.* "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

PSALM LXXXI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician upon Gittith." Gittith is explained in several ways. One interpretation is that it was a musical instrument invented in Gath, or common among the Gittites. Or it may have been the name of a tune to which the Psalm is to be sung, and which originated from Gath. Others have derived the word from גִּתִּית = a wine press, and concluded that it denotes an instrument which was used by those accustomed to tread the wine-vat, and intended to accompany the songs of the vintage. Fuerst in his *Lexicon* says it is the "proper name of a musical body of Levites, who had their chief seat in the Levitical city גִּתִּית רֵמֹן." "A Psalm of Asaph." This Psalm appears to have been composed by Asaph, who was the contemporary of David.

Occasion.—The Psalm seems to have been composed for the celebration of the Passover. "It is well remarked by De Wette that as the Hebrews were required to make known to their children the design of the ordinance of the Passover (see Exod. xii. 26, 27), nothing would be more natural than that the sacred poets should take occasion from the return of that festival to enforce the truths pertaining to it in songs composed for the celebration. Such seems to have been the design of this Psalm,—reminding the people of the goodness of God in the past, and recalling them from their sins by a remembrance of His mercies, and by a view of what would be the consequences of fully obeying His law."—*Barnes*.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

(Verses 1-7.)

In these verses we have an exhortation to worship God. By nature man is a worshipper. There is that within him which impels him to render homage

to some thing, or being. If this tendency of our nature be misdirected, its exercise will be most baneful in its influence upon us. But if it be rightly

directed, its exercise will influence us most blessedly. Religious worship is set before us here,—

I. In its Object. “God”—the Supremely Good. The object is—

1. *A Person.* Not an abstraction of the intellect, or a mental concept, a mere idea. Nor yet an impersonal influence or force. Nor yet the absolute *substantia* underlying all phenomena. But a Divine Person.

2. *A Person related to us.* The Psalmist does not represent God as enthroned in solitary and awful grandeur, having no interest in His creatures, and being inaccessible to them. He is “God our strength,” “the God of Jacob,” who regards the cry of His troubled people, and delivers them. He is deeply concerned in the welfare of His creatures, and is ever actively engaged in promoting it.

3. *A Person of supreme excellence.* “God,” THE GOOD. He is essentially and infinitely perfect. He is worthy of the homage of the noblest spirits. There are in Him those properties which meet our deepest and holiest cravings. The intellect craves truth; and in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The conscience cries out for rectitude; and in His character and administration He presents to us the example of immutable and perfect righteousness, and by the salvation of Jesus Christ makes us partakers thereof. The heart longs for perfect goodness, for some one to love who meets its ideal of excellence, who abideth faithful, and abideth evermore; and the longing is met by God in Christ. In Him the heart finds rest. The spirit yearns for some supernal and unfading beauty and glory, which it may admire and adore; and God answers the yearning by revealing Himself to “the pure in heart.” Here is the one sublime Object of true worship. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.” “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.”

II. In its character. Several characteristics of true religious praise are here indicated.

1. *It is hearty.* “Sing aloud, . . . make a joyful noise.” It is not mere loudness and noise that are desired, but a loud noise as the natural expression of a full heart. The Lord delights in the hearty worship of His people. The psalmody of merely professional choirs, however perfect artistically it may be, is obnoxious to Him who will be worshipped “in spirit and in truth.” If there must be deficiency in our psalmody, it is better far that it should be in the musical execution than in the spiritual feeling.

2. *It is joyous.* “Make a joyful noise.” There are seasons in life when we feel that

“Notes of sadness
Best befit our state forlorn.”

But, when we recall the benefits which we have received from God, and the great things which He has done for us, songs of gladness should be the true expression of our feelings. We should praise God not with funeral dirges, but with grateful anthems; not with plaintive cries, but with cheerful hearts and joyous songs.

3. *It is variously expressed.* “Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp, with the psalter,” &c. The use of both vocal and instrumental music is here enjoined. It is an ignorant prejudice which would exclude all instrumental music from religious worship, a prejudice which is directly opposed to much of the teaching of the inspired Word concerning worship. When instrumental music is an aid to vocal, and when it stimulates or expresses religious emotions, it is not only lawful, but eminently desirable.

III. In its obligation. “This was a statute for Israel,” &c. Religious worship is here represented as a binding duty. On what ground does this obligation rest? Why does God require us to worship Him?

1. *Because it is right.* The obligation to praise God is based upon—(1.) *What He is in relation to us.* He is

our Creator, Sustainer, Sovereign. (2.) *What He is in Himself.* He is a Being of infinite perfection. We are so constituted that we ought to reverence that which is holy, to love that which is kind and good, to admire that which is beautiful, to trust that which is truthful. God is infinitely truthful, beautiful, good, and holy, therefore we ought to trust, admire, love, and adore Him—we ought to worship Him. Or we may argue the obligation to worship God,—

2. *Because it is needful.* That necessity shapes itself to our mind in this way. (1.) *Man must worship.* If he worship not the true God, he will exalt some creature into a god, or make an idol of wealth, pleasure, fame, &c. (2.) *That which man worships exercises the mightiest influence upon him.* Worship is a transforming thing. We become like unto the object of our worship. Let a man make power his idol, and he will grow into a cruel tyrant. Let any one worship pleasure, and his sensuous and animal nature will be developed at the expense of his moral and religious nature. Let another make wealth his god, and he will shrivel into a wretched miser. Let a man worship any fellow-creature, and he will come to resemble him, and it is very probable that the resemblance will be most complete in eccentricities and imperfections. (3.) *The worship of God is the only one which is conducive to human well-being.* Worshipping God our whole nature receives harmonious and happy development. Adoring Him in Christ we “are being transfigured into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.” Our highest blessedness is in the worship of Him “who is God over all, blessed for ever.” Therefore the Lord commands us to worship Him.

IV. In its incentives. “I removed

his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots,” &c. The Psalmist in verses 6 and 7 represents Jehovah as addressing them, and reminding them of His goodness in delivering them from Egypt, with its oppressions and distresses. He does this as an incentive to them to worship God. God’s goodness to us should awaken our gratitude to Him, and gratitude is one of the chief elements of worship. The remembrance of God’s former mercies should awaken us to praise Him in thankful songs; while the blessings that we are constantly receiving should lead us to live lives of grateful praise. A correct estimate of God’s goodness to us and its due impression upon our heart would prove an abiding incitement, and ever-increasing in power, to move us to worship Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. *See these characteristics of true worship.* It must have God for its Object; it should be hearty, joyous, and reverent, and it may be variously expressed. 2. *Remember that such worship is a duty which we owe to God.* Reason, conscience, gratitude, aspiration, and the holy Word all urge the command, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God.” 3. *Let us esteem it a privilege rather than a duty.* If through Christ we are atoned unto God, and are walking with Him, then religious worship will be the heaven of our soul. 4. *Let us cultivate worship as the very spirit of our life.* Let gratitude, trust, adoration, be an abiding spiritual state with us. Let us seek to be of those

“With whom the melodies abide
Of th’ everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.”
—Kibbe.

THE SOLICITUDE OF GOD FOR THE WELL-BEING OF MAN.

(Verses 8-16.)

We shall endeavour to expound this section of the Psalm from the 13th verse, as from a centre. In that verse

the Psalmist, speaking as the mouth-piece of the Lord, expresses an intense wish that Israel had followed the Divine

counsel and kept the Divine law. We regard it as an utterance of God's solicitude for man's well-being.

I. The solicitude of God for the well-being of man is very deep. "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways!" God in His great love here expresses His regret because of the sin and punishment of His people. He is not an unfeeling, cold, heartless Ruler. He is profoundly interested in those over whom He reigns. Their holiness and happiness are a great pleasure to Him. Their sin and suffering cause Him sorrow and pain. This is not the only passage in which He laments the disobedience and punishment of Israel. (See Isa. xlviii. 18; Hos. xi. 8.) So also our Lord mourned, with intense feeling, over the guilty and doomed people of Jerusalem. (See Matt. xxiii. 37.) With all the unfathomable love of His nature God mourns over our sins and sorrows. He is not willing that any of His creatures, created in His image, should perish. The depth of His solicitude for the good of man is manifested by the gift of His only-begotten Son for human salvation. "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."

II. The solicitude of God for the well-being of man has respect to his various needs. The Divine arrangements concerning Israel were of such a nature that, if they had kept the commands of the Lord, their peace would have been secured, their wants abundantly and choicely supplied, and their prosperity continued. God would have—

1. *Subdued their enemies.* "I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him." He would have fought their battles and vanquished their foes; for they were His foes also. If they had been obedient to the Lord, He would have conquered their enemies *quickly*. "Soon," in a little time, He would have defeated them. They would not have been long harassed by them. He would have conquered their enemies *completely*. So

utterly would He have broken their power, that even those whose hearts were still hostile to them and to Him, would come and acknowledge His supremacy, feeling themselves powerless to stand against Him. Let Christians learn a lesson from this. Our spiritual enemies are many, subtle, and powerful. We are not able to subdue them. But if we walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, He will speedily vanquish them for us. Our foes cannot harm us if we are in the way of His commandments. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." If they had been obedient, God would have—

2. *Supplied their wants.* "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. . . . He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat; and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee." The provisions here indicated are *most choice*. "The fat of the wheat," the very best food of the land. And even in the hard and barren rocks the bees should have stored the finest honey for them. The provisions here indicated are *most abundant*. They were to open the mouth wide, and God promises to fill it. He promises to "satisfy" them. How rich and abundant are the blessings which God has provided for us! Very appropriately has Christianity been compared to a great feast. Its blessings are various and choice—"Wine and milk;" pardon, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, the favour of God, the hope of heaven, &c. Its blessings are abundant and free. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Buy wine and milk without money and without price." The riches of Christ are "unsearchable riches." The treasures of His grace are inexhaustible, infinite.

3. *Continued their power and prosperity.* "Their time should have endured for ever." Had they remained faithful to God, their possession of Canaan would have been undisturbed, their peace and prosperity would have been perpetuated. It was their unbelief and disobedience towards God that

brought upon them all their sufferings and sorrows. Even so it has ever been, and in all cases. "Righteousness exalteth a nation." Persistence in evil will overthrow the most ancient thrones, and ruin the most magnificent kingdoms. Sin is the deadly enemy of the peace, prosperity, and power of both individuals and nations. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

III. The solicitude of God for the well-being of man recognises the great conditions of that well-being. Two great conditions of the well-being of man are mentioned here—

1. *Receiving communications from God.* "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me." There can be no true growth, peace, or joy for man, except in communication with God. While priests and prophets spake to the Jews, and they gave heed to them, it was well with the nation. But when the "people would not hearken to" the voice of the Lord, dark clouds began to gather on the firmament, and speedily heavy storms fell upon them. The true well-being of man can never be secured except his mind and heart are in a condition to receive the light and truth of God.

2. *Rendering obedience to God.* "O that Israel had walked in My ways," &c. Human blessedness is ever dependent upon obedience to Divine law. "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good;" and it is only as man walks in the way of the commandments that he can be virtuous, useful, or blessed. The Jews had disregarded the divinely-prescribed way; and, as a result, their peace and prosperity had forsaken them. Even the unfathomable solicitude of God for our well-being cannot secure that well-being except we render to Him loyal obedience. (See Ps. xix. 7, 8, 11.) Wouldst thou know the secret of the true blessedness of being? Learn it in true-hearted obedience to God. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep

His testimonies; that seek Him with the whole heart."

IV. The solicitude of God for the well-being of man is exercised in harmony with man's moral freedom. He commands, exhorts, entreats Israel to that obedience upon which their happiness depended. He endeavoured to allure them to righteousness and faithfulness by His promises. He sought to deter them from evil by His threatenings. By both goodness and severity He tried to save them from sin and ruin. When all means failed to bless and save them, He pathetically bewails their obstinacy in sin, and its consequences. But He never attempts to compel them to yield obedience to Him. He respects man's moral freedom.

1. *Notwithstanding the solicitude of God for their well-being, Israel would not obey Him.* He had commanded them not to worship idols, but to worship Him alone. And as an incentive to obedience He reminded them of the wonderful display of His power when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and of their obligations to Him by reason of what He had done for them. But they would not obey Him. God saves men with the consent of their will, not against their will.

2. *Notwithstanding the solicitude of God for their well-being, He left them to themselves.* When Israel proved incorrigibly depraved, He "gave them up unto their own hearts' lust; and they walked in their own counsels." They would not be governed by Him, so He allowed them to attempt self-government. They would not listen to His voice, so He ceased to speak to them. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." "Quench not the Spirit." No punishment is more severe than that of being given up by God, and none is more just. Man first abandons God, utterly turns his back upon Him, persistently disregards His voice, and sets at nought His will, and then God leaves him to take his own course. "My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me.

So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust." He will not coerce the will of man.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let the solicitude of God for our salvation encourage us to trust in Him.* 2. *Let the solicitude of God for our salvation arouse the careless to solicitude for themselves.* If God is so anxiously concerned for your well-being, it surely behoves you to consider your

own state. 3. *Let us beware lest, notwithstanding the solicitude of God for our salvation, we destroy ourselves by our self-will.* Our moral freedom is a most glorious endowment. Let us not pervert it into a crushing curse.

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."
—Tennyson.

EXHORTATION, PROMISE, AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

(Verse 10.)

Illustrations of this metaphor are often met with. Oriental rulers have been known to put jewels into the mouth of a favourite. God's blessings are better than these. He pays well. There is another illustration. At an Eastern feast the master will take a piece of the fattest part of the meat, dip it in the liquid fat, and, by way of compliment, will put it in the mouth of a favoured guest. There is yet another illustration. Last year I discovered suddenly a nest of young birds. Unable to fly, the little creatures at once mistook the intruder for their mother, or their father, and opened their mouths, until each seemed to be all mouth. The text contains—

I. An exhortation. "Open thy mouth wide." What does it mean? 1. *Labour after a sense of need.* The birds feel a lack by instinct. Prayer with Christ's people should be an instinct also. We need all things, and in ourselves have nothing. Let us become conscious of weakness. We have not attained to a high degree of grace, if we think we have done so. A sense of spiritual wealth is a token of poverty. We must count ourselves nothing. 2. *Open the mouth wide and increase the vehemence of desire, so that "no" cannot be taken for an answer.* Prayers speed best which are vehement, not those which "besiege" the throne of the Almighty, and make one's flesh creep by their irreverence. Still, if we would have great things, we must want them terribly, must "hunger and thirst after righteousness." 3. *The way of opening the mouth—pray for capacity.* In the bird's nest where goes the biggest piece? Into the widest mouth. It is so with

us; we have different capacities. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. A bushel cannot be put into a peck. May we become more capacious. Let us seek after greater things. God can do more than we ask. He that craves spiritual good will have it—God will be sure to give it. It is in His way to give great things. We should not ask trifles, nor be satisfied with being little Christians. Then we must attempt great things. William Huntingdon prayed for a pair of leather breeches, and he got them. William Carey prayed for India. The one was a little thing, soon done with; the other is still being answered.

II. A promise. "I will fill it." It is a great God who says it. God has a way of filling our mouths so that they are never empty. What does He fill us with? *With prayer, with arguments, a sense of want, of desire.* He will give all kinds of spiritual blessing.

III. An encouragement. It is Jehovah who speaks. He says, "I am God." With men ask little, and expect less; with God ask much, and expect more. We cannot with our need surpass His benevolence. In prayer we ask our own, because we are Christ's. The Lord has brought us from Egypt. He cannot do for us again so much as He has already done. Life in the soul is the master blessing. What cannot God do who brought the plagues on the enemies of Israel? Who would not ask great things of such a God? He makes a path for His people. And we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.—C. H. Spurgeon, from a report in *The Christian World*.

PSALM LXXXII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm of Asaph." (See Introduction to Psalm lxxiv.)

Occasion.—We are unable to determine upon what occasion the Psalm was written. It is clear, however, that it is addressed to wicked magistrates or judges. It has been called "the Judges' Psalm, wherein is taught the duty of judges and rulers." The question has arisen whether the Psalm is directed against wicked judges amongst the Jews, or whether we are to regard the Jews as the poor and afflicted, and their heathen enemies as the unjust judges. The former appears to be the correct opinion. All that is here said of corrupt magistrates may frequently have been said of the judges of the Hebrews. (Comp. Isa. i. 17, 23, 26.) And there are in the Psalm itself convincing evidences that it was intended to apply to the Israelitish rulers.

ASPECTS OF MAGISTRACY.

In this Psalm Asaph sets magistrates and judges before us in several aspects.

I. As occupying a distinguished position. He speaks of them as "gods" and "sons of the Most High." The word *Elohim*, "gods," is one of the names applied to the Supreme Being. It is not like *Jehovah*, a name indicating *essence*, but a name of *office*. The word *Elohim* occurs in several places, where it is translated "*judges*" (Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 9, 28). This name was given to the judges as representing God in the theocracy, and as judging in His name and by His authority. In charging the judges, Moses distinctly asserted that "the judgment is God's." And in seeking judgment from them the people are said to seek it from *Elohim*. The office of magistrate is Divine. God by His servants applies to them one of His own names. They are appointed to administer judgment for Him. They represent Him in His judicial relation to men. They are to be honoured because of their office. And, under the theocracy, any insult which was offered to them was regarded as offered to God Himself. St. Paul says, "The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." The office of magistrate and judge is one of the most responsible and honourable of all offices, and should be filled by men of keen and comprehensive intelligence and of unimpeachable uprightness. It is

an office, too, which should ever be regarded with respect and honour.

II. As observed by God. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." Perowne: "God standeth in the congregation of God." "The congregation of God" is the congregation of Israel, the people of God, among whom the judges were called to exercise their functions, and among whom He can suffer no injustice. The idea seems to be that the exercise of magistracy among His people was carried on beneath His inspection.

1. *He is the observer of all magisterial acts.* He stands in the congregation of His people, mindful of their interests, taking cognisance of their affairs, noting their oppressions, and watching how they fared at the seat of judgment. In all courts of justice He is present, seeing whether righteousness is enthroned there.

2. *He is the judge of all magisterial acts.* "He judgeth among the gods." At His bar those who have judged others must stand and be judged themselves. It is a solemn consideration for all magistrates and judges that they must appear at the judgment seat of Christ, and render an account for every administration of the law which they have exercised. Let them ponder it, and strive to discharge their important duties uprightly and faithfully. Let the oppressed remember it and rejoice. God judgeth in the earth. He will ultimately correct all false judgments, and judge righteously amongst all men.

III. As called to the highest duties. Judges are exhorted by the poet to "judge the poor and fatherless, do justice to the afflicted and needy; deliver the poor and needy, rid them out of the hand of the wicked." (Comp. Isa. i. 17.) The idea seems to be that judges were to take up the causes of those who were unable to urge them themselves, whether by reason of orphanhood, poverty, or any other disability. Not that they should pronounce verdicts in their favour because they were orphans or poor, but that their poverty or orphanhood should not be any barrier in the way of obtaining their rights. The Supreme Judge has ever warmly espoused the cause of the widow, the fatherless, the poor, and the oppressed. Hear His Word on this subject. (See Exod. xxii. 22-24; Deut. x. 17, 18, xxvii. 19; Ps. lxviii. 5, cxlvi. 9.) Let magistrates remember that God is the helper of the helpless, the champion of the cause of the fatherless, the widow, and the needy; and let them see to it that they attentively regard and justly deal with the causes which God has espoused. "If a poor man has an honest cause, his poverty must be no prejudice to his cause, how great and powerful soever those are that contend with him." "Suffer not the afflicted to be further afflicted by enduring injustice, and let not the needy long stand in need of an equitable hearing."

IV. As exhibiting the worst perversity. The judges and magistrates are charged with the gravest perversion of their high office. The Psalmist accuses them of—

1. *Ignorance.* "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness." They were ignorant probably in two respects—(1.) As regards *the law*. They had not striven to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the law which they were appointed to administer. (2.) As regards *the facts* of the causes which were brought before them. They did not patiently and thoroughly investigate the causes on which they were called to adjudicate. Their ignorance was *wilful*. They did not care to know the law or

the facts. Their high office had lost for them its sacredness. The ruling motive of their conduct was selfishness rather than the desire to discharge their duties intelligently and conscientiously. They love bribes rather than truth and righteousness. They have left "the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness," and now "they walk on in darkness." How can such men discharge the holy duties of their office aright? The Psalmist accuses them of—

2. *Injustice.* "How long will ye judge unjustly and accept the persons of the wicked?" The injustice with which the judges are charged is that of *partiality* or *favouritism*. They did not deal with and decide cases according to their facts and circumstances, according to their merits, but according to the wealth, or rank, or influence of the persons concerned. They not simply showed favour to the rich, the exalted in rank, and the powerful. That would have been evil. Partiality is ever wrong in a judge. But they accepted the persons of *the wicked*. They showed favour to them in their wickedness. A greater perversion of judgment is almost, if not quite, inconceivable. As we have seen, the office of magistrate or judge is one of the highest and most important, but when it is perverted, the perversion is most sinful, and the result most terrible. The office itself is Divine; the conduct of the men who filled it was diabolic. And the result of *this maladministration of justice was extreme social disorder*. "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." The whole fabric of society was shaken, and seemed to be tottering into ruin. Its very foundation principles were dislocated. These corrupt judges, instead of promoting order and harmony, were bringing all things into a state of anarchy and misery.

V. As tending to a great change. "Ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." Here we have—

1. *Something which is common to all men.* These judges had been spoken of as "gods," but they must submit to death like the poorest wretch who had

ever stood at their unrighteous judgment bar. Death comes equally to us all, and makes all equal when it comes. In that respect, the peer has no advantage over the peasant, or the prince over the pauper. "He bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." Death is the great leveller.

2. *Something peculiar to men of exalted position.* "Fall like one of the princes." Some interpret this that death would be more painful to them amid their worldly power and material luxuries than to the poor amid their poverty and hardship. Their elevated position would render their fall the more distressing. But the true interpretation seems to be that they should die a violent death, and be cut off in the midst of their days. "The expression, 'as one of the princes,' reminds them of the numerous examples in early times of similar dignitaries who were removed by the judgment of God. The connection shows that it is *fallen* princes that are meant." Men holding high and responsible positions who abuse their privileges and powers, are frequently cut down by violence. "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." How vain, then, is it for men to pride themselves upon their eminent positions or sounding titles!

The conduct of magistrates and judges is here set forth—

VI. As leading man to cry for the inauguration of the direct magistracy of God. "Arise, O God, judge the earth: for Thou shalt inherit all nations."

1. *This cry springs from man's longing for judgment.* In all ages the wronged and oppressed have lifted up their hands to heaven, and implored the interposition of God. Justice being denied them here, they have turned their imploring eyes to God and cried, "Arise, O God, judge the earth."

2. *This cry implies the inadequacy of human judgments.* Man has failed to

rectify the wrongs under which the race has groaned for ages. The administration of justice has often been *maladministration*, a disgrace and a curse. And, even at its best, human magistracy is not able to rectify the disorders, and adjust the inequalities of this world.

3. *This cry implies confidence in the judgment of God.* The Psalmist trusted the *justice* of God. From the partiality and corruption of human judges he confidently carried his appeal to "the Judge of all the earth."

"Heaven is above all, yet; there sits a Judge
That no king can corrupt."—*Shakespeare.*

The Psalmist trusted the *sovereignty* of God. He knew that all nations belonged to Him. The administration of the affairs of the whole world pertained to Him. And so the Psalmist appealed to Him, in strong assurance that He would hear and respond to his appeal. The grand hope of the world is in the interposition of Him whose justice is unimpeachable, and whose sovereignty is universal.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Let us be thankful that in this land and in this age, as a rule, justice is administered with great intelligence and strict impartiality.* 2. *Let unjust magistrates and judges, and all who seek to gain or promote an unrighteous cause, be warned.* "He judgeth among the gods."

"In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In its true nature; and we ourselves com-
pell'd,
E'en to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence."—*Shakespeare.*

3. *Let the oppressed behold their hope.* "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all nations."

THE PILGRIMAGE OF THE WICKED.

(Verse 5.)

“They walk on in darkness.”

The life of all men upon earth is a pilgrimage, a journey.

1. A journey *constantly prosecuted*. Asleep or awake, frivolous or earnest, sinful or holy, we are ever advancing on this journey. 2. A journey *rapidly prosecuted*. “My days are swifter than a post; they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships; as the eagle that hasteth to the prey.”

3. A journey *irretraceably prosecuted*. In the walk of life there is no going back to our yesterdays. We pass along the way but once. 4. A journey *of great importance*. There is an end to our earthly pilgrimage, and the nature of the end is determined by our conduct on the journey. We are preparing our future heaven or hell as we tread the path of daily life. In this journey the wicked “walk on in darkness.” Their pilgrimage is characterised by—

I. Privation. Night hides the beauties and sublimities of the landscape. They are there even as in the daytime, but the darkness veils them. When the darkness is very great even the stars, the peculiar glory of the night, are obscured. The sinner sees not the morally sublime and beautiful. The glory of God surrounds him, but he is in darkness, and beholds it not. The truth of God is revealed, but he sees it

not, for he walks on in darkness. The spiritual privations of the wicked are many and great; *e.g.*, pardon, peace, &c.

II. Folly. The wicked condemn themselves to these privations. “They walk on in darkness,” because they *will* so to do. Light is in the world, but they elect to prosecute their journey in the dark. They may walk in the day if they will, but they prefer to walk at night. The sinner excludes himself from all the true brightness and joy of life. Sin is arrant folly.

III. Peril. “If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth.” Obstacles may overthrow him, he may step over a precipice and be shattered into fragments, hostile powers may approach unobserved and kill him. Faint images these of the moral perils which beset the sinner in his darkened walk.

IV. Criminality. To walk on in moral darkness when we may walk in the light of truth is sinful. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

V. Ruinousness. If men persist in walking in darkness they will, sooner or later, stumble into hell.

Sinners, turn from your dangerous course. While yet you may, turn from darkness to light, from sin to the Saviour, from hell to heaven.

PSALM LXXXIII.

INTRODUCTION.

This is the last of the Psalms of Asaph. If the Psalm refers to the times of Jehoshaphat, the author was probably “Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph,” upon whom “came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation” (2 Chron. xx. 14). In the 19th verse we read that “The Levites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high.” Probably this was the Psalm which they sung.

Occasion.—Hengstenberg says, “There is no room for doubt as to the historical occasion of the Psalm. It refers to the war of Jehoshaphat against the allied Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and other nations, and forms the earliest as to subject of a series of cognate Psalms. While it makes mention of the help of God *in the midst of danger*, the 47th Psalm was sung, after the discomfiture of the enemy, *on the field of battle*, and the 48th, at the thanksgiving service *in the temple*. This view has been taken by all commentators, except those who have been prevented from arriving at the truth by some prejudice, such as that all the Psalms of Asaph were composed in David’s time, or that the narrative at 2 Chron. x. is not historically correct.” Alexander, Perowne, and Spurgeon hold the above view.

THE PERIL AND PRAYER OF THE CHURCH.

Amyraldus writes,—“The Psalm may be applied now to the enemies of the Christian Church, of which Israel was the type. The most important and formidable of these are assuredly *sin* and *Satan*, from whom we most especially long to be delivered.” Regarding the Psalm thus, in the peril of Israel we have an illustration of the peril of the Church of Christ, and in the prayer of Israel an illustration (in some respects) of the prayer of the Church of Christ.

I. The peril of the Church. The peril of Israel at this time arose from her enemies, who had banded themselves together to make war against her and destroy her power. Several things in the disposition and conduct of the confederate forces are here mentioned which would make their hostility formidable.

1. *Their hostility was violent.* “For, lo, Thine enemies make a tumult.” They were loud and clamorous in their opposition to Israel, and were rushing on tumultuously to accomplish the destruction of the people of God. There have been times in the history of the Church of Christ when violent opposition has been directed against her. In the apostolic age how tumultuous were her foes! And how they raged in the time of the Roman emperors! Such enemies as Voltaire and Tom Paine have been loud in their opposition to Christianity.

2. *Their hostility was confident.* “They that hate Thee have lifted up the head.” In dismay or penitence the head is bowed down; in courage and confidence it is lifted up. The enemies of Israel proudly lifted up their heads, feeling assured of success. Their vast numbers, and compact unity, and great power, seemed to them to place their triumph far beyond question. And so men have felt confident that they could destroy the Church of Christ, and have published abroad their intention and power to do so, and to do so speedily—with what results the existence, position, and power of the Church to-day declare.

3. *Their hostility was crafty.* “They have taken crafty counsel against Thy

people, and consulted against Thy hidden ones.” They were not only strong in power, but subtle in strategy also. Their plans were matured with much care and cunning. And Satan and his emissaries, in seeking to destroy the Church of our Lord, put forth all their skill in the formation of their schemes of operation. The Church has to contend against Satanic cunning as well as against Satanic power. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” “That old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.” “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

4. *Their hostility aimed at the utter ruin of Israel.* “They said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.” They did not merely aim at arresting the progress or crippling the power of Israel. Nothing would satisfy them but the utter destruction of the chosen people. They seek to cut off both root and branch from the face of the earth, leaving of them not even a memorial. Such is the aim of Satan and his allies against the Christian Church. They would banish all true religion from the world. Every Christian temple they would pervert into a “synagogue of Satan;” every godly man they would cut off; all religious literature they would destroy. This has been attempted by means of persecution. But persecution purified and strengthened the Church. The foes of the Church are now seeking her overthrow by corruption and error working within. Ritualism and Rationalism are doing their part towards the destruction of the Church. The rash and hasty conclusions of scientists, and the conceited dogmatism of the professors of “the higher criticism,” are arrayed against the Book. But the Book and the Church are unconquerable, indestructible. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against” the Church of Christ.

5. *Their hostility was united.* “They

have consulted together with one consent; they are confederate against Thee." There was unanimity in their counsels. Their mutual hostilities they laid in abeyance, that they might unite in one irresistible and all-conquering army. They solemnly covenanted together to seek the destruction of the Hebrews. And there is unity amongst the enemies of the Church in the matter of opposing her and seeking her overthrow. The Jews and Romans, hostile in other respects, united against Christ. The Sanhedrim, Pilate, Herod, and the people all united in opposition to Him. "Of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together." This is an illustration of the opposition of the world and the devil to the Church in our own day. Opposed in other things, the unchristian world is united in this.

6. *Their hostility was powerful.* No less than ten nations were joined in this confederacy against Israel. "Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarenes, Gebal, Amon, Amalek, the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre, Assur also." All the nations bordering on Palestine had joined the confederacy, so that the chosen people were quite surrounded by enemies. And some of these enemies were very powerful, so that they felt confident of complete triumph. And Israel turned to God in prayer for help as to their only resource. The enemies of the Christian Church are many and mighty. Satan is strong, subtle, and numerous supported. Sin is strong. Many forms of evil are united against the Church. The lusts of the flesh, drunkenness, gluttony, uncleanness, the greed of gold, the ruinous absorption of mind and heart in temporal and material things, the frivolities of fashionable life, the vices of fast life, the assaults of dishonest scepticism, the miserable negations of atheism, and the corruptions within the Church itself, all tend to its overthrow. Yet the Church, loyally trusting in God, is stronger than all her foes. They may assault her, but

their assaults will be like those of the tumultuous waves which furiously dash against a rock-bound coast to be hurled back as if in calm contempt.

It is noteworthy that in this statement of their trouble and danger the poet represents the enemies of Israel as the enemies of God, the confederacy against Israel as a confederacy against God, and the people of Israel as the people of God. Thus they identify their cause and interest with God's. Their foes hated the laws and religion of God; and in striking at His people, they were striking at His kingdom in this world. The strength of the Church is in her oneness with God. When she is loyal to Him, He saith to her persecutors, "Why persecutest thou Me?" No weapon that is formed against her shall prosper.

II. The prayer of the Church.

"Keep not Thou silence, O God: hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God. . . . Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin," &c.

The people here pray—

1. *For the interposition of God.*

"Keep not Thou silence, O God: hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God." There are times when God seems as though He did not observe the circumstances and needs of His people, or as though He were not concerned for their prosperity or safety. He stands as it were aside, taking no part in their affairs. His people here pray that He would not thus treat them on this occasion, but that He would speak in mighty deeds, and arouse Himself for their help and defence. The prayer of this verse is clearly an urgent one. The brevity and rapidity and repetition of the request, all indicate the imminence of the need and the earnestness of the desire. It is well when the Church in her dangers betakes herself to the throne of grace to implore the help of God. Not in the wealth of her material resources, not in the wisdom and eloquence of her leaders, not in the patronage of parliaments and princes, but in the presence and power of God in her midst, is the Church's true and sure defence against her foes.

2. *For the utter destruction of their*

foes. "Do unto them as unto the Midianites, as to Sisera, as to Jabin," &c. (verses 9-15). These petitions are evidently for their utter destruction. The confederate foes of Israel had agreed to seek her utter ruin, and now in her turn Israel pleads with God that He would terrify, trouble, and completely destroy them. (On the imprecations (vers. 9-17) see our remarks on Psalm lxi. 22-28; and the quotation from Perowne on pp. 163, 164.) The Church of Christ should both pray and work for the destruction of her enemies. We would destroy the wicked by destroying their wickedness. We would that all sinners were exterminated by their being regenerated into saints. We would that all the enemies of the Lord were destroyed by becoming loyal to Him.

3. *For the confusion of their foes.* It seems strange to pray for the confusion of their foes after having prayed for their complete destruction. Yet this is done in the Psalm. "Fill their faces with shame: let them be confounded and troubled for ever." The prayer is that the schemes of the enemies may be thwarted, their purposes defeated, their designs baffled, their plans all overturned; and that with shame and trouble their confederacy may be broken up for ever. This is a very fitting prayer for the Christian Church. It is both wise and right, our duty and interest, to pray that the counsels of the wicked may be frustrated, the designs of hell baffled, and all the politics of the enemies of the Church confounded.

4. *For the submission of their foes to God.* "That they may seek Thy name, O Lord." The context will not allow us to interpret this as a seeking of the friendship and favour of God. It means simply, that they may seek Thee in forced submission, being able to hold out no longer. But we who have learned of Christ may urge this petition with a much higher and diviner meaning. It is ours to pray that the plans of the enemies of God and of His Church may be baffled, that so they might be led to know and trust Him. May their wicked plans be brought to confusion that they might be brought to conversion.

5. *For the glory of the Divine name.* "That men may know that Thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the Most High over all the earth." The context compels us to regard the knowledge and acknowledgment as not voluntary, but forced. The prayer is that God would so display His power against the foes of Israel that men would be compelled to acknowledge His supremacy in the earth. So, but with a fuller and higher meaning, let the Christian Church pray for the universal diffusion of the knowledge of the glory of God.

The subject preaches its own conclusion. We are surrounded by a host of foes; "we have no might against the great company that cometh against us." But the Lord of Hosts is with us. Through Him we shall do valiantly. Onward, Christian soldiers, in God's name; and ye shall be "more than conquerors through Him."

PSALM LXXXIV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician upon Gittith." (See Introduction to Ps. lxxxi.) "A Psalm for the sons of Korah." (See Introduction to Ps. xlii.)

Occasion.—The Psalm was evidently composed when the writer was exiled from the sanctuary. It was probably written by David when he was compelled to flee from Jerusalem by reason of the rebellion of Absalom. He laments this chiefly because it separated him from "the courts of the Lord." Homiletically, the Psalm sets forth, The exile's longing for the house of God, vers. 1-4; Religious progress, vers. 5-7; and The exile's prayer, vers. 8-12.

THE EXILE'S LONGING FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD.

(Verses 1-4.)

The Psalmist was banished from his capital and from the tabernacle of the Most High by the wicked rebellion of his son Absalom. This exile must have been one of the most painful experiences in the life of the royal bard. When he left the holy city he did not conceal his sorrow, but "went up by the ascent of Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up." A sadly pathetic sight this—the noble king in his old age driven forth by the rebellion of his own son from the city which he had founded or ornamented, the abode, for many years, of all his power, his glory, and his happiness, perhaps never more to return to it. But his great and pious soul was great and pious then as ever. And in his exile his greatest grief arose from the fact that he was sundered from the worship of the tabernacle of God, and his most ardent desire for himself was to return to an enjoyment of its privileges. *The exile's longing for the house of God—*

I. Arose from his love for the house of God. "How beloved are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" "Amiable" or lovely does not express the meaning of the word used by the Psalmist; but dear, beloved. The plural, "tabernacles," is used in reference to the divisions of the sanctuary, each part being regarded by the poet as the abode of God. The tabernacle was dear to David. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." Every godly soul loves the house of God, and delights in His worship. The Psalmist doubtless had excellent reasons for his love to the house of God. And so have we. We love it because—

1. *It is the place of holy fellowship.* In its sacred engagements the holiest and bravest souls unite. The communion of saints in divine and blessed

exercises and experiences—in penitence, prayer, praise, aspiration, adoration—is enjoyed in the sanctuary.

2. *It is the place of social prayer and praise.* There the glad and grateful heart pours out its joy and thankfulness to Him in hymns of praise consecrated by a thousand precious memories. And sincere, humble, devout praise is a foretaste of heaven. And there the anxious, troubled spirit can cast its burden in prayer upon the heart of the loving Father, or its sin upon the Saviour, and find rest.

3. *It is the place of instruction and exhortation.* The teachings of the living and abiding Word of God are here set forth. The teachings of a godly and enlightened ministry cannot be too highly estimated. And its warnings and exhortations are often of unspeakable importance and value.

4. *It is the place of Divine communion.* "There," said the Lord, "I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat." To the godly soul the presence of God is the great attraction in the sanctuary. When His presence is blessedly realised, the grand object of worship is attained. But if His presence is not realised, no matter whosoever or whatsoever else may be present, the one essential thing is lacking. "In His presence is fulness of joy." Adoration, in the consciousness of His presence and approval, is the heaven of the soul. For all these reasons the godly soul loves the house of God.

II. Was a longing for conscious fellowship with God. "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." It was not so much the courts of the Lord's house that he longed for as the living God Himself. Religious ordinances are lifeless, useless things, mere formalities, if they do not help us consciously to realise the presence of the living God. The soul which is alive and healthful cannot bear the sense of distance from God. He is its life, its

health, its inspiration, its joy, its crown, its supreme and essential good; and in His absence it languishes and is cast down. Moreover, the Psalmist addresses God as One in whom he confided and with whom he was accustomed to hold converse—"My King and my God." Though exiled from His courts he still loves the King. Though far from the tabernacle he still claims God as his portion. The repeated "*my*" is precious and suggestive. It shows his holy intimacy with, and strong confidence in, and deep affection for, God. God is all in all to the godly soul.

III. Was the longing of his entire being. "My *soul* longeth, . . . my *heart* and my *flesh* crieth out for the living God." The Psalmist was not conscious of any thought or feeling opposed to this strong desire. His whole being concurred in it. He says that his "*flesh*" even, which we so frequently find lusting against the spirit, cried out for God. All the desires and aspirations of his nature were for communion with God. The whole man, with every faculty and affection, thirsted for the sacred engagements and Divine communion of the tabernacles of the Lord. The Psalmist seems to have attained that state for which the apostle, ages after, prayed on behalf of the Thessalonians. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved blameless." Brethren, blessed will it be for us when our whole being is thus athirst for God. In response to such desires God will give fullest and divinest satisfactions.

IV. Was a longing of great intensity. "My *soul* longeth, yea, even *fainteth* for the courts of the Lord; my *heart* and my *flesh* crieth out for the living God." The word translated "*longeth*" by itself denotes an intense desire, a pining after a thing. "It means literally," says Perowne, "'hath grown pale,' as with the intensity of the feeling." Then there are the other words. "*Fainteth*," is spent, faileth of strength, is exhausted. "*Crieth out*" in earnest importunate desire. It would be difficult to express the intensity of

desire more strongly than it is here expressed. It was, in its intensity, that kind of longing which God never denies, when it seeks for that which is in accordance with His will. In our day the evidence of such ardent desire for the means of grace is conspicuous chiefly by its absence. In religious services to a painful extent the outward show and glitter of ritualistic ornament, or the fine musical performances of professional choirs, or the gifts of some popular preacher, are the things desired rather than the presence and fellowship of God. Oh, for more of the holy longing of David!

V. Led him to extol the blessedness of those who were constantly engaged in God's house. To David the lot of the little birds who had their nests in the vicinity of the tabernacle seemed enviable as compared with his own. They in perfect safety could place their dearest possession, their young, in their nests about the tabernacles; but he was an exile far away from the tabernacle, and exposed to constant and great perils. And as he thought of the priests and levites who ministered in the sanctuary, and who were entirely devoted to its sacred services, and had their dwelling near to it, he said, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee." So David desired to live all his life in conscious and blessed fellowship with God, to walk with God every day and in all things, and never to be separated from the opportunities of social worship. He esteemed the life of those who ministered in the sanctuary a life of praise. And it is certain that a holy life, a life of communion with God, is a life of praise. Whatever may be its occupations, whatever its circumstances and outward conditions, praise will be its spiritual mood. They who have attained the blessedness of the "Father's house" above, have reached the fulness of that the foretaste of which David here speaks of. They "*dwell*" in God's house. They are made "pillars in the temple of God, and go no more out." In that high world every place is consecrated by the presence and smile of God. There

all service is blessedness ; activity is ecstasy ; work is worship.

CONCLUSION.—True social worship is indeed a precious and blessed thing. It is now essentially a spiritual thing, and is independent of any special locality.

“From every place below the skies,
The grateful song, the fervent prayer,
The incense of the heart, may rise
To heaven, and find acceptance there.”

Let us seek to live a life of communion with God and praise to Him. Let our life be worship.

“My will be swallowed up in Thee ;
Light in Thy light still may I see,
Beholding Thee with open face ;
Call'd the full power of faith to prove,
Let all my hallow'd heart be love,
And all my spotless life be praise.”
—C. Wesley.

RELIGIOUS PROGRESS.

(Verses 5-7.)

Religious progress is here represented—

I. As deriving its support from God.

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee.” Spiritual life flows from God. He starts the soul in its upward course. All true religious progress may be traced back to Him. All spiritual vitality and strength come to men by reason of their connection with Him. The explanation of this is not difficult. *Well-grounded faith is a strengthening thing.* “All things are possible to him that believeth.” Columbus with invincible faith is mightier than mutinous crews, conqueror of coward fears, and, despite his frail vessels and opposing winds and waves, he accomplishes what the world had pronounced impossible. In the spiritual life faith brings over the all-sufficiency of God to replenish the exhausted moral powers of our being. God is the only true ground and object of faith. “He that believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.” *Well-centred affection is a strengthening thing.* There are no difficulties which love will not encounter, no labours which it cannot endure, no perils which it cannot brave. Supreme love to God fills the soul with invincible energy. Only as our love is fixed on Him shall we find complete satisfaction and full spiritual power. *Well assured hope is a strengthening thing.* It has been well said that “Hope is the companion of power, and the mother of success ; for whoso hopes strongly has within him the gift of miracles.” While a man retains hope, however adverse his circumstances may be, he

may yet conquer. Hope imparts one of the most powerful of inspirations. But in the spiritual life God is the only object or person in whom we can safely place our hope. In every way the strength of the godly man is in God.

II. As advancing in conformity with God's law. Hengstenberg's rendering and interpretation of the last clause of the fifth verse appears to us to be correct. “*In whose hearts are ways.*” The second condition of salvation is, that a man has *ways, made roads*, in his heart. By this is designated zealous, moral effort, blamelessness, and righteousness. The heart of man, in its natural condition, appears like a pathless wilderness, full of cliffs and precipices ; and repentance is a levelling of the roads. The following passages are parallel : Psalm l. 23, ‘whoever prepares a way, to him will I show the salvation of God ;’ Prov. xvi. 7 ; and Isa. xl. 3, 4.” Matthew Henry, in applying the words, also uses them in this sense. “If we make God's promise our strength, we must make God's Word our rule, and walk by it.” There can be no true religious progress except God's will is our law of life and conduct. It is in vain that we talk of “higher life” except we are growing in hearty recognition of, and loyal obedience to, that will. The soul that is really progressing utters itself in strains like these : “Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts. I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Thy Word. Thy

Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." True religious progress is progress in holiness of heart and life.

III. As making unfavourable circumstances conduce to its own ends. "Who passing through the Valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools." "The Valley of Baca" is the valley of tears or of weeping. We are by no means certain that the Psalmist by the phrase referred to any particular locality. And if he did it is impossible now to determine where that valley was. The idea is that, "As the valley of weeping is an image of misery, the fountain is an image of salvation." By their faith in God and fellowship with Him they transformed the gloomy and inhospitable valley into a valley of refreshment and joy. By the grace of God the godly soul can compel the unfavourable circumstances of his pilgrimage to help him onward in his career. In the desert of affliction the grace of God opens up a fountain of consolation and peace, and so the affliction becomes the occasion of blessing. Tennyson sings of one,

"Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;"

and so forces his way to great eminence and influence. In like manner, by the blessing of God, the good man by resisting temptation acquires moral strength, by means of tribulation he grows patient, by means of suffering he attains unto spiritual purity, and tenderness, and beauty. "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that," &c.

IV. As steadily advancing. "They go from strength to strength." Progress is a great law of life. "Where there is life there is growth. The law is seen in all creation—in the tiny moss upon the wall and the lordly oak of the forest, in the insect of an hour, and the beast of the field. And the Christian is enjoined to grow in grace, not in wealth, or in power; but in that appropriation of the revealed will of God to the heart that results in satisfying, not some one faculty or passion of the soul, but the whole man." God

calls us to move onward and upward. "Leaving the principles of the doctrines of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind," &c. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance," &c. Let us seek to advance from strength to strength, from strength of patience to strength of hope; from strength of hope to strength of faith; from strength of faith to strength of vision. Let us aim at expressing our inner life in the activities of growth and usefulness. In our career there must be no pause. The goal of yesterday must be the starting point of to-day. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles," &c.

V. As gloriously terminating. "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Those who set forth in the various companies on their way to Jerusalem shall arrive there in safety, and join in the holy festivities. None shall perish on the way. None shall turn back without having attained the object in view. The godly soul moves onward to a glorious end. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads;" &c. "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." Our progress leads onward right to the palace and throne and presence of the King. Our pilgrimage ends at home, our "Father's home." We have spoken of our progress as *gloriously terminating* at the heavenly Zion; but it terminates only to begin again under higher and more blessed conditions and circumstances. The progress of the godly soul is a never-ending progress. When millenniums of growth and glory have been realised by the ransomed of the Lord, they aspire to yet higher and diviner things, crying, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Have we entered upon this career of progress? Have we*

started, and started truly and well, in the religious life? Know we the blessedness of "the man whose strength

is in God"? 2. *Christian pilgrims, are you advancing?* "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin," &c.

THE EXILE'S PRAYER.

(Verses 8-12.)

I. The address which is presented. "O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Behold, O God our shield." In this address the Psalmist reminds God of—

1. *His sovereign power.* "Lord God of hosts." "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou?"

2. *His covenant relation to His people.* "God of Jacob." "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me, in vain." He has pledged His faithfulness and mercy to them when they call upon Him.

3. *His protecting care of His people.* "God our shield." "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield." David could not hide himself at this time in the secret of God's tabernacle, but he could hide himself in God Himself.

II. The object which is sought. "Behold, and look upon the face of Thine anointed." The "anointed" is David himself, who was anointed, or set apart, to the office of king. He presents no petition except this, that God would look upon him, which is a way of asking Him to grant His favour. David's great desire was to return to the joys and fellowships of the sanctuary, there his heart was fixed, thither his face was directed; and, having expressed his ardent affection for it, he needed not to specify his desires any further than he does here. "Hear my prayer: look upon the face of Thine anointed." Show me Thy favour and grant me the desire of my heart.

III. The pleas which are urged. "For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather," &c. (vers. 10, 11). The Psalmist urges in these words three pleas why God should restore him to the privileges of the sanctuary—

1. *His great affection for the house of God.* In his estimation—(1.) *A little time there was preferable to a long season elsewhere.* "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand" elsewhere. (2.) *The lowest station there was preferable to the highest elsewhere.* "I would rather sit at the threshold in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Would not God hear his prayer, and restore him to the place he loved so well and dearly?

2. *The relations which God sustains to His people.* (1.) *He is a "sun."* From Him His people derive their light, and strength, and joy. (2.) *He is a "shield."* From Him His people derive protection in time of peril. As a "shield," would He not guard His servant from the dangers to which he was at this time exposed? As a "sun," would He not grant to His servant the light and joy of His presence in His tabernacle?

3. *The gifts which God bestows upon His people.* (1.) *He gives "grace."* In every time of need we may hear His voice saying unto us, "My grace is sufficient for thee." "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things," &c. (2.) *He gives "glory."* "The glory which Thou gavest Me," said Christ, "I have given them." The purity of moral conquest, of spiritual purity, and of unfading hope. In a word, the glory of moral resemblance to Christ. Glory in its dim beginning here, in its splendid fulness hereafter. (3.) *He withholds no good.* Nothing that will really contribute to our well-being will He withhold from us if we "walk uprightly." Surely the God who confers such gifts upon His people would grant unto David, His anointed, the desire of his heart, in bringing him back again to the courts and tabernacles of the Lord.

IV. The sublime conclusion of the whole. "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." This blessedness the Psalmist possessed. In the depths of his soul there was a peace which no rebellion in his kingdom, no sin and sorrow in his family, no banishment from the sanctuary, could shake, for it depended upon God alone. If God granted to him the desire of his heart, great would be his delight; but if He

should not do so, still was he blessed, for he trusted in God,—God was his portion.

CONCLUSION.—1. *In the trials of life what is it we feel most?* David's greatest trial was the loss of his religious privileges. How different, alas! is the case of many others! 2. *Is our trust reposed in the Lord of hosts?* Then, whatever our circumstances may be, we are blessed.

THE LORD GOD A SUN AND SHIELD.

(Verse 11.)

We propose to glance at *the figures, the facts, and the persons* which the text presents to our attention.

I. **The figures.** "The Lord God is a sun and shield."

1. *The sun dispenses light.* "God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." The moon, which is the lesser light here referred to, derives her light from the greater; and consequently the sun may properly be represented as the source of light, so far at least as we are concerned. If this glorious orb were blotted out of existence, everything around us would be involved in obscurity. And what would be the state of the human mind, especially in relation to religious subjects, if it were not for the illuminations of "the Sun of Righteousness"? Alas! all would be gloom and uncertainty.

2. *The sun imparts life.* During the months of winter, an immense number of creatures either cease to exist, or remain in a state of torpidity. But in the spring of the year, when the orb of day begins to exert an increasing influence, what a remarkable change takes place! Animals and vegetables are alike the subject of a revival; and the whole face of nature is renewed. Equally remarkable, and much more important, are the effects of that Sun by the warmth and energy of whose beams life is imparted to those who were dead in sin.

3. *The sun produces fruitfulness.* When, during a part of the year, we are favoured with but little of his

presence, barrenness and sterility are observable on every hand. But the season of promise returns at the appointed time. The sun gradually rises higher, and continues longer above the horizon. The happy results are immediately perceptible; and it is not long before we are favoured with the appointed weeks of harvest. The heart of man may, with great propriety, be compared to a soil; but, alas! it is naturally hard, and dry, and barren,—so far, at least, as spiritual things are concerned. The good seed of the kingdom may be sown thereon with a liberal hand, but until the Sun of Righteousness shines upon it in all His glory and effulgence, no signs of fruitfulness will gladden the eye.

The Psalmist tells us Jehovah "is a shield." The shield is a piece of defensive armour used by warriors, and attached to the left arm, as a protection against the injuries to which they are exposed from the enemy. We are, therefore, reminded that the people of God are surrounded by foes, with whom it is their duty to contend; and that in the time of conflict, they may look to Him whose cause they espouse for succour and protection. In all ages, Jehovah has been the defence of His people; consequently, none of the weapons formed against them have prospered.

II. **The facts.** "The Lord will give grace and glory," &c.

1. "The Lord will withhold no good from them that walk uprightly." It is probable that the reference here is

principally to temporal things ; *the comforts and conveniences of life*. They are secured to the believer, so far as is conducive to his good, in the covenant of grace. There may also be a reference to *afflictions*. He, who knows us better than we know ourselves, may see that they will be good for us ; and if so, they will not be withheld.

2. "*The Lord will give grace.*" Whatever afflictions we have to endure while upon earth, all will be well if this promise be fulfilled in our experience. The grace of God will sanctify both us and our afflictions,—*us* as vessels fitted for the Master's use, and *them* to the advancement of our best interests. It will sustain us in the time of trial, and enable us quietly to submit to the Lord's will. It will strengthen us in running the race that is set before us. It will give us the victory over every adversary ; and at length hold out the crown of righteousness, which fadeth not away.

3. "*The Lord will give glory.*" This is the consummation of grace, and is reserved for the world to come. If religion afforded its professors no enjoyment whilst on earth, the glories of heaven would prove an ample reward.

III. *The persons.* "Them that walk uprightly." Those walk uprightly who walk with God. And who are they that walk with God ?

1. That *man* does so, who, in all his engagements, recognises the Divine authority, consults the Divine will, and seeks the Divine blessing.

2. That *woman* walks with God, who, like Mary, has chosen the good part which can never be taken from her ; and delights to sit at the Saviour's feet, to hear His words,—who, like Martha, is found diligently attending to household duties,—and, at the same time, like Dorcas, is "full of good works and alms-deeds."

3. That *child* walks with God, who, like Samuel, is desirous to hear the words of Divine wisdom ; and, like Timothy, has acquired a knowledge of those Scriptures which are able to make him "wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus."

CONCLUSION.—1. If the Lord God be a sun, let my hearers pray that they may be enlightened, quickened, and qualified to bring forth fruit unto holiness, that the end may be everlasting life. 2. If He be a shield, let His protection be sought in every season of conflict and danger. 3. If He will withhold no temporal good from His people, let them rely on His paternal regards. 4. If He will give grace, let it be expected in every time of need. 5. If He will give glory, let it be prepared for and anticipated. 6. If those only who walk uprightly have a right to expect this blessedness, let unceasing solicitude be manifested that the character may be formed by grace Divine, so that it may be viewed with approbation by Him who will render to every man according to his works.—*The Young Minister's Companion.*

PSALM LXXXV.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"To the chief Musician." See Introduction to Ps. lvii. "*A Psalm for the sons of Korah.*" See Introduction to Ps. xlii.

"There seems," says Perowne, "every reason to conclude that this Psalm was written after the return of the exiles from the Babylonish captivity. It opens with an acknowledgment of God's goodness and mercy in the national restoration, in terms which could hardly apply to any other event. But it passes immediately to earnest entreaty for deliverance from the pressure of existing evils, in language which almost contradicts the previous acknowledgment. First, we hear the grateful confession, 'Thou hast turned the captivity of Jacob ;' and then we have the prayer, 'Turn us, O God of our salvation.' If the third verse contains the joyful announcement, 'Thou hast withdrawn all Thy wrath,' &c., the fifth pleads as if no such assurance had been given : 'Wilt Thou for ever be angry with us?' &c. The most probable way of explaining this conflict of opposing feelings is by referring the Psalm to the circumstances mentioned by Nehemiah (chap. i. 3). . . . The 126th Psalm is conceived in a somewhat similar strain."

A GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION.

(Verses 1-3.)

I. Of national deliverance. "Lord, Thou hast been favourable unto Thy land; Thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob." Thus the Psalmist acknowledges the goodness of God in the restoration of His people from the Babylonish captivity. At the very beginning of the Psalm the poet expresses *the identity of God's interest and theirs.* "*Thy land.*" God had chosen this land to be the dwelling-place of His people. He had driven out the heathen from it, and established His worship in it. This intimacy of relation to it is named evidently with a view of obtaining further manifestations of His favour towards it. It is well when we can realise and plead in our prayers the identity of God's interest and ours. When we are devoted to His work, and seek the accomplishment of His purposes, and aim at His glory, when we live for Him, we may plead with Him in our distresses that His favour shown to us will promote His own cause. The Psalmist traces their deliverance to the favour of God. All their happiness and prosperity flowed to them from His goodness. We may regard their distress as illustrating the troubles into which we are brought by reason of our unfaithfulness to God. Our backslidings of heart have been many, and our consequent spiritual darkness and distress great, yet God in His favour has restored to us the light and help of His countenance. It was a happy and helpful thing for the Jews in their present troubles, that they were so wealthy in recollections of great blessings from God in past times. Such recollections would—1. *Inspire them with hope.* 2. *Encourage them in prayer.* 3. *Incite them to effort.*

II. Of the removal of the Divine anger. "Thou hast taken away all Thy wrath; Thou hast turned Thyself from the fierceness of Thine anger." The captivity was regarded as a sign of the Divine wrath; and their restoration as a sign that that wrath no longer burned

against them. God is angry with His people when they sin against Him. His wrath ever burns against sin. He longs to save sinners from their sin. Sin is the "abominable thing which He hates." The Psalmist gratefully recollects past seasons in which God had turned away His anger from them. The recollection of those seasons would encourage the Hebrews in pleading with Him to remove His displeasure from them. What He had formerly done He would probably do again.

III. Of the bestowal of forgiveness. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people; Thou hast covered all their sin." Not only had He removed His anger from them, but had forgiven the sin which caused His anger, and restored unto them His favour. The forgiven soul has the assurance that God will not charge his sins against him. The Bible is rich in declarations of the readiness of God to pardon all who penitently seek Him. (See Ps. cxxx. 4; Isa. lv. 7; Jer. xxxiii. 8; 1 John i. 9.) The expressions used by the Psalmist indicate the *completeness* of God's forgiveness. "Thou hast forgiven," *borne away*, "the sins of Thy people." There is doubtless a reference to the scape-goat which was sent out into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people, and never more returned. "Thou hast covered all their sin." It is *all* hidden away. It is *all* completely hidden away. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The recollection of God's former forgivenesses encouraged the Psalmist to pray for His forgiving mercy at this time. He is unchangeable. What He has done for His penitent people in times past, He

will do for them again if they approach Him in penitence.

CONCLUSION.—We have grateful memories like these of the Psalmist. Let them have their due and proper effect upon us. They should inspire us with—
1. *Humility*. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us accord-

ing to our iniquities.” What if He had? What, but utter ruin? 2. *Gratitude*. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?” 3. *Confidence*. “This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide unto death.”

AN EARNEST SUPPLICATION.

(Verses 4-7.)

The prayer presented to God in these verses is for His deliverance of His people from the affliction or distress from which they were suffering at this time. The deliverance which is implored is represented in several aspects; but let us notice—

I. That with a view to their salvation the people pray for repentance. “Turn us, O God of our salvation.” This petition indicates a right understanding of the state of the case, and augurs well for the success of their prayer. They had turned themselves to folly and sin, and now they pray that God would turn them from their sin, and grant them true repentance. The first and chief thing for the erring tribes of Israel was that they might be turned from sin unto God. It would have been in vain if they had prayed for the removal of the Divine anger apart from this change in themselves. The beginning of their distresses was in themselves, and in order to their complete restoration there must be a change in themselves. This is true as regards the salvation of the soul. If there is no conversion, no turning of the soul from sin unto God, there is no salvation. The Psalmist, speaking for the people, asks God to turn them. It needs the power of Divine grace to convert a soul. Salvation both in its origin and completion is the work of God. Yet when a soul turns to God in prayer, and prays for repentance, it is a sign that its salvation has already begun.

The deliverance which is implored is represented—

II. As a cessation of God's anger. “Cause Thine anger toward us to cease.

Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever?” &c. They rightly regarded their distresses as a sign of the Divine anger because of their sins. And they plead with God that He would remove that anger from them. Mark with what force they plead. “Wilt Thou be angry with us *for ever*?” Is there no boundary to Thy wrath? Is the flame of Thy fury unquenchable? His anger had continued so long that it almost seemed to them as though it would never cease. “Wilt Thou be angry *with us* for ever?” It is true that we have sinned against Thee, and merited Thy displeasure; yet we are Thy people, and the sheep of Thy pasture. Thus they appeal to His compassion towards His own, as an argument for the removal of His wrath. “Wilt Thou be angry with us for ever?” God had made Himself known to them as “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;” and could He be angry with them for ever? The idea seems opposed to His own revelation of Himself. And, blessed be His name! His anger ceases as soon as any person or any people turn from their evil ways in penitence to Him. “I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man; the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

III. As a manifestation of His mercy. “Show us Thy mercy, O Lord.” They sought salvation from their troubles or calamities as a favour from the hand of God. They felt that they did not deserve it, could not ask

for it on any ground of merit, so they seek it as a mercy from God. Mercy is the disposition whereby God is inclined to succour those who are in misery, and to pardon those who have offended. It is to the mercy of our God that we look for salvation. It is to His mercy that we are indebted for the countless blessings of life. Archbishop Tillotson has well said: "Consider how many evils and miseries that every day we are exposed to, by His preventing mercy are hindered, or, when they were coming upon us, stopped or turned another way. How oft our punishment has He deferred by His forbearing mercy; or, when it was necessary for our chastisement, mitigated and made light! How oft we have been supported in our afflictions by His comforting mercy, and visited with the light of His countenance, in the exigencies of our soul and the gloominess of despair! How oft we have been supplied by His relieving mercy in our wants; and, when there was no hand to succour, and no soul to pity us, His arm has been stretched out to lift us from the mire and clay, and, by a providential train of events, brought about our sustenance and support! And, above all, how daily, how hourly, how minutely we offend against Him; and yet, by the power of His pardoning mercy, we are still alive! For, considering the multitude and heinousness of our provocation, 'it is of His mercy alone that we are not consumed, and because His compassions fail not. Whoso is wise will ponder these things, and he will understand the loving kindness of the Lord.'"

IV. *As a quickening.* "Wilt Thou not revive us again?" Their condition was like that of our world in winter. The earth is cold, the winds are bleak, the trees are bare and show no signs of life, the flowers are all withered and gone, the fruits of field and garden are all gathered; death seems to reign on all hands. But how the scene changes with the advent of spring. All things seem to burst into a new life of wondrous wealth and beauty. The people pray that they in like manner may be quickened from their state of desolation into a state of life and prosperity.

"Revive us with comforts spoken to us, revive us with deliverances wrought for us." This prayer for revival is one which we, both as individuals and as churches, need to present frequently to God. The petition implies—

1. *The presence of life.* Where there is utter death it is folly to talk of revival.

2. *The decline of life.* The healthfulness and vigour have departed. Life's pulse beats feebly.

3. *The desire for the renewal of the freshness and power of life.* Where this desire is strong, decline will soon be superseded by growth, and barrenness be changed to fruitfulness.

4. *The conviction that God only can impart such renewal.* A true revival cannot be "got up" by any man, or any number of men. "O Lord, revive Thy work."

V. *As a means to their joy in God.* "That Thy people may rejoice in Thee."

1. *Their revival would be a joy to them.* The removal of their distress and the return of prosperity would make glad their hearts.

2. *Their joy would be in God.* "When God changeth the cheer of His people, their joy should not be in the gift, but in the Giver." "If God be the fountain of all our mercies, He must be the centre of all our joys."

3. *God willed their joy.* Of this they were persuaded, or they would not have pleaded for deliverance on this ground, that it would give them joy. God takes pleasure in the joy of His people. "Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servant." He is eternally and infinitely blessed, and He delights in the blessedness of His people. Our songs of gladness are more pleasing to His ear than any sighs of sadness can possibly be. (a) "There is always joy in a revival of religion. Nothing is so much fitted to make a people happy; nothing diffuses so much joy (comp. Acts viii. 8). (β) This is particularly joy in God. It is because He comes near; because He manifests His mercy; because He shows His power and His grace."—Barnes

Such, then, are the aspects in which their salvation is viewed in this prayer to God.

CONCLUSION.—Our subject addresses itself to individuals and churches in which vitality has declined, and depression exists.

1. *Here is encouragement for you.* Our God is the "God of our salvation." His mercy is infinite. His salvation is "unto the uttermost." He is both able and willing to raise you from

your low estate into health and prosperity.

2. *Here is example for you.* In earnest supplication take your case unto Him. First seek to be made right yourselves, and then to be made happy. First pray, "Turn us, O God of our salvation," and then, "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" And His salvation will not tarry, and His joy will not be withheld.

THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

(Verse 6.)

Many Christians have come to have a distaste for the word "revival" when used with reference to religious work. There has been so much exaggeration, so much fanatical excitement, and so much transient profession, that I cannot wonder at the revulsion which many sober-minded Christians feel when they hear the very word "revival." All "got-up" revivals are bad. You cannot organise a true revival; you cannot treat spiritual influences as fixed quantities. As a matter of fact, there have been extraordinary visitations of Divine influence; there have been seasons when the Holy Ghost has made the earthquake, the fire, the rending wind, and the stormy tempest His ministers, and when men have been shaken with a wholesome fear, not knowing the way, yet feeling the nearness of the Lord. There have been great birthdays in the Church, when prodigals have come back to sonship, when shepherds have returned with recovered flocks, and the dead have risen to immortal life. There have, too, been times when the people have realised with special vividness the personality and life-giving power of the Holy Ghost; when they have had the keys of interpretation wherewith to unlock the boundless treasures of the Divine Word; when prayer was as the speech of love that never wearies; when the Sabbath shed its sacred glory over all the days of the week; when God's house shone with heavenly lustre, and all life throbbed in joyful harmony with

the purposes of God. Cannot such delights be more permanently secured? At the same time, we are not constituted for constant rapture; we have to contend with the deceitfulness of the flesh; we have to fight and suffer upon the earth, &c. Still there is danger that we may be content with low attainments. There is a steady and penetrating glow of piety, there is a *fervour of love*, there is an animated intelligence, a zealous affection, a godly yearning for personal progress and social evangelisation, which, when found together, make up a life of delight in God, and blessed service for men. To promote this realisation I ask your attention to a few suggestions.

I. As individual Christians, and as churches of Jesus Christ, *we need to be very clear in our doctrinal foundations.* Let us get a distinct idea of the principal points in the Christian faith. Beginning with the doctrine of *sin*, let us strive after God's view of it. To Him sin is infinitely hateful; He cannot tolerate it with the least degree of allowance; it troubles His otherwise perfect and happy universe; it despoils human nature; it is the cause of death and the source of hell. To under-estimate the heinousness of sin is to put ourselves out of the line of God's view; to understand sin is to understand redemption. Sin interprets the cross; sin shows what is meant by God's love. Have we, as individuals and churches, lost the true notion of sin? Is it no longer infinitely abominable to us? Is

it toned down to something almost indistinguishable? We cannot be right in our relation to Jesus Christ until we regard sin with unutterable repugnance.

Out of a true knowledge of sin will come a true appreciation of *Jesus Christ as the Saviour*. I could sum up my creed in a sentence, yet that sentence contains more than all the libraries in the world: I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD! My heart hungers for Him, my sin cries out for His mercy, my sorrow yearns for His coming; and when He does come He speaks just the word that my soul needs; He understands me; He knows me altogether; He can get down into the low, dark pit into which sin has thrown me; He draws me to His cross; He hides my sins in His sacrifice; He shows me how God can be honoured, yet the sinner forgiven; He destroys the devil, and puts within me the Holy Ghost; He so fills me with life that death has no longer any terror with which to affright me.

If we lay firmly hold of these two points, viz., the sinfulness of sin and the work of Jesus Christ, we shall come to know what is meant by what I have ventured to call the *glow* of piety. Only the liberated slave can know the joy of freedom—only the recovered leper can appreciate fully the blessing of health. . . . Do we know sin in its essential, unchangeable loathsomeness? Do we love Jesus Christ as the only, the Almighty, and the ever-blessed Saviour? Then, out of this should come an intense fervour of piety. We should have strength here.

II. We must have a *public ministry which is faithful to the spirit and demands of Jesus Christ*. All Christian ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ in seeking the salvation of men. . . . We must not throw off the old words—Repentance, Faith, Salvation—and the things that they signify must be the very life-blood of our ministry. In any genuine revival of interest in Christianity there must be a revived interest in a preached Gospel. The sanctuary will be thronged, and the thronging listeners will be justly im-

patient of everything that does not bear immediately and intensely upon the salvation of men. . . . Then must we be made to feel that the doctrines of the Gospel are humbling doctrines; that they smite down our natural pride and self-trustfulness; that they kill before they make alive; that out of our utter impoverishment and nothingness they bring all that is distinctive and enduring in Christian manhood. . . . I am confirmed in the opinion that we should devote ourselves with increasing earnestness to seeking the salvation of men when I look at the character of our general congregations. We address the public, not a select few; we speak to men whose whole time is engrossed in worldly engagements; we speak to the poor, the unlearned, the sorrowing; we address the young, the careless, the worldly; and to such there is nothing that can be preached that will so instantly touch the heart as the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. . . . Whilst there will be this full and bold proclamation of evangelical doctrine in the pulpit, there will be a system of *teaching* proceeding more privately. Some men have a peculiar gift in biblical teaching, and those men should be encouraged to pursue their laborious but most necessary vocation. The preacher and teacher should be fellow-labourers. The preacher should collect men into great companies, arrest their attention by earnest and convincing statements of Christian truth, and then pass them on, so to speak, to the critical and patient teacher. Thus the man of God will become thoroughly furnished; having received deep instruction, he will be able to give a reason for the faith and hope that are in him, and he will be strong to resist the importunities of those who are driven about by every wind of doctrine.

III. There is one feature in our public Christian life which I should like to see more fully brought out—I mean the *bearing of individual testimony on behalf of Jesus Christ*. By no means seek to supplant what is known as the regular ministry, but supplement it; and at all costs destroy the impression that nobody has a good word to say for

Christianity except its paid teachers. . . . Why should not the banker, the great merchant, and the eminent lawyer

say publicly what God has done for their souls?—*Dr. Parker.* Abridged from *The City Temple.*

AN ENCOURAGING ANTICIPATION.

(Verses 8-13.)

The Psalmist, as the representative of the people, having reviewed God's former mercies to them, and urged their prayer for salvation from their present distresses, *resolves to listen for the Divine response to their supplication.* "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." He becomes silent, that he may hear the voice of God. His anxiety and fervour of prayer are stilled, and he seeks to attain that state of spiritual attention that shall catch the first whisper of the Divine voice, and of spiritual receptiveness that shall secure the first instalment of the Divine blessing. Having spoken to God, it becomes us to listen for His reply. The Psalmist *expected an answer from God, and therefore he waited and listened for it.* In this he is at once a rebuke and an example to us. *A rebuke,* inasmuch as we have so frequently offered our prayer without any real thought of its being answered. We have not waited God's reply, because we did not expect Him to reply. *An example.* When we pray let our prayer be real; let us honour God by our confidence, and then, like the Psalmist, we shall expect and listen for His voice in reply to us.

The Psalmist is confident *that God will grant a favourable answer to their prayer.* "He will speak peace unto His people." Thus, in general, does he speak of the response which he expected from God. God's reply would be such as would impart to them outward peace in deliverance from their troubles, and inward peace in the communications of His grace. And now the Psalmist, with some particularity, sets forth his anticipations as to God's answer to their prayers. Consider—

I. *The blessing anticipated.* Several particulars are mentioned by the poet.

1. *Deliverance from their distresses.* "His salvation is nigh them that fear

Him." His hand was "*nigh*" to help them; and their deliverance would be effected speedily. Such was the confident anticipation of the distressed people. And surely every tried and oppressed child of God now may feel equally confident that, in answer to prayer, He will speedily appear bringing salvation with Him.

2. *Exaltation to honour.* "That glory may dwell in our land." *The glory of the Divine presence and worship.* God's presence would be manifested in their salvation; and, being delivered from the evils under which they groaned, they would render to Him a more hearty and more constant worship. *The glory of national prosperity.* "Our land shall yield her increase." Husbandry should be diligently prosecuted, and God's blessing would come down upon the land in sun and shower; and fruitful seasons and abundant harvests would be the result. There should be an increase of worship and of spiritual prosperity, and an increase of work and of material prosperity. And in their spiritual peace and temporal happiness, their glory as the people of God would be manifest, and His glory as the God of His people would be manifest also.

3. *Prevalence of moral excellence.* "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." "This may be understood," says Matthew Henry, and we think correctly, "of the reformation of the people and of the government, in the administration of which all those graces should be conspicuous and commanding. The rulers and ruled shall all be merciful and true, righteous and peaceable. When there is no truth or mercy all goes to ruin (Isa. lix. 14, 15; Hos. iv.

1); but when these meet in the management of all affairs, when these give aim, when these give law, when there is such plenty of truth that it sprouts up like the grass of the earth, and of righteousness that it is showered down like rain from heaven, then things go well. When in every congress mercy and truth meet, in every embrace righteousness and peace kiss, and common honesty is indeed common, then glory dwells in a land, as the sin of reigning dishonesty is a reproach to any people." In support of this interpretation of these verses we remark—(1.) *The absence of these moral qualities had often led to disastrous results in the history of Israel.* (2.) *The prevalence of these moral qualities would follow the fulfilment of their petition, "Turn us, O God of our salvation."* (3.) *The prevalence of these moral qualities is conducive in a great degree to social and commercial prosperity.* (4.) *The prevalence of these moral qualities is the securest bulwark and the brightest glory of any nation.* This was indeed a bright and cheering anticipation of the poet and the people.

II. The character of those for whom the blessing is anticipated. Certain marked features in the character of the people who should receive this blessing are indicated.

1. *Consecration to God.* "His people, His saints." They were a people called of God, and consecrated to God. They were subject to His will, and sanctified by His grace.

2. *Veneration of God.* "Them that

fear Him." "Salvation is far from the wicked," but it is "nigh them that" regard God with sincere and becoming reverence.

3. *Obedience to God.* "Righteousness shall go before Him, and shall set us in the way of His steps." The idea of the last clause appears to be that the effect of the coming of the Lord for their salvation would be to dispose men to tread in His footsteps, to be imitators and followers of Him in respect of righteousness. The blessings of salvation are for the obedient. "The new salvation rests throughout upon the foundation of the new obedience." Hence the warning, "Let them not turn again to folly;" for if they did, their prosperity would vanish, and their distresses would return again. The same is true of the blessings of the Gospel. Our Lord saves His people "from their sins," not in their sins. We must walk "in the way of His steps," if we would share His blessedness.

CONCLUSION.—What is the salvation for which we are looking? Is it deliverance from a hell of material torment, and the enjoyment of a heaven of self-indulgence? Then the ideas of the ancient Jews were more advanced and spiritual than ours. The salvation of a state is not in its great armaments, or its vast wealth; but in the prevalence of "mercy and truth, righteousness and peace." The salvation of individuals is in their conformity with the will of God, in reverencing Him, in consecration to Him. If these things are realised in us, great will be our blessedness.

THE SPEAKER, THE LISTENER. THE PEACE.

(Verse 8.)

Let us meditate on this verse under the following heads:—

I. The listener. "I will hear," says the writer of this Psalm. He speaks as a listener, as one whose ears are open. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This is our true attitude into which we come at conversion. God said, "Hear, and your soul shall live;" He "opened our ears to hear as the

learned," i.e., as "one who is under teaching." So we began to listen; and, in listening, found life. Such is to be our life; a life of listening; not to man, nor self, nor the world, but to God. As creatures, listening is our proper attitude, much more as sinners. Let the willing ear be ours. How much we lose by the closed ear!

II. The Speaker. "God the Lord;"

God, even Jehovah. Other speakers may win the ear of the multitude, but it is to God the Lord that the saint listens. His voice is powerful. Its tones are penetrating; its words attractive. God speaks as one entitled to be heard, expecting to be heard. He speaks with authority, waiting for our obedience to the heavenly voice. To less than such a speaker we do not feel constrained to listen, but to Him we must. He speaks, we cannot but hear.

III. The message. "He will speak peace to His people." He is the God of peace; "He maketh peace in His high places." Peace is the substance of the message that has all along been carried to us; peace to him that is afar off, and to him that is nigh; peace in heaven; peace on earth; peace between man and God; the peace of pardon, the peace of reconciliation; the peace that passeth all understanding—peace through the blood of the cross, through Him who is our peace. It might have been wrath, nay, *ought* to have been wrath; but it is not wrath, only *peace*; for He is long-suffering and slow to wrath; nay, God is love!

IV. The confidence. The Psalmist knows what He is to expect from such a God. Before the peace comes, he knows that it is coming; for he knows the God to whom he is called upon to listen. This is the confidence which he has in Him. He does not listen uncertainly, as not knowing what will come forth. He has heard of this God before—of what He does and speaks—and he opens his ear in happy confidence. He is sure that no wrath will come, only

love, only peace. This God is the God of salvation—the God who gave His Son. Shall He not then speak peace?

V. The issue. "Let them not return to folly;" or, and "they shall not return to folly." He does not say, Let them not turn to folly, and *then* He will speak peace to them; but He will speak peace first, and then they shall not return to folly. This is God's order; the true and Divine order; the reverse of man's. It is not first holiness and then peace, but first peace and then holiness. The root of all holiness is peace with God. Till the clouds are rolled away and the sun shines out, we cannot be warmed and enlightened. Till the frost is gone, and the ice dissolved, the river cannot flow on and water the fields. Christ did not say, Go, and sin no more, and I will not condemn thee; but, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." . . . The first step to a holy life is being at peace with God. . . . This great point between us and God once settled, we are free to devote our undivided energies to the work of progress; not till then.

A saint, then, is one who has listened to God; who has heard the words of peace from His lips; who has believed them; who has been reconciled; and who knows that he is so. Therefore he seeks to be holy. He hates his former folly. He does not return to it. He does not make his free pardon a reason for returning to it.

Brethren, be consistent. Show that the peace you have received is a holy peace. — *H. Bonar, D.D.* Abridged from *Light and Truth*.

PSALM LXXXVI.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Prayer of David." Although this Psalm is not placed with the great body of David's Psalms (1-lxx), there is no sufficient ground for disputing his authorship of it.

Occasion.—Barnes says, "The occasion on which it was composed is unknown, but it has been commonly supposed that it was written in the time of the persecution under Saul." But the opinion of Hengstenberg, that it was written during the dangers to which David was exposed by reason of the rebellion of Absalom, seems to us better supported by the evidence which the Psalm itself affords. Amid the dangers to which he is now exposed, the Psalmist calls to mind for his encouragement a remarkable deliverance which God had formerly granted to him (ver. 13). May it not have been that the former deliverance was from Saul, and his present danger from Absalom? Still we cannot with certainty determine the occasion of its composition.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO SEEK HIM.

(Verses 1-5.)

The "Prayer of David" runs through the whole Psalm, but as the Psalm is too long and suggestive for treatment in one homily, we purpose dividing it by the grounds on which for his encouragement the Psalmist bases his prayer. Let us consider—

I. The petitions of the suppliant. The Psalmist prays—

1. *For audience.* "Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me." The petition seems to include—(1.) Divine *condescension*. Being sensible of his unworthiness of the regard of God, he prays Him to "bow down" His ear to his prayer. (2.) Divine *attention*. "Hear me." It is not a petition that God would simply hear the prayer of the Psalmist, but that He would hear him favourably, that He would hear and bless him.

2. *For protection.* "Preserve my soul, . . . save Thy servant." David was at this time exposed to danger, his very life was in peril; he prays that God would protect his life, and deliver him from his enemies. If God protect us we are invulnerable. Saul could not harm David, though he sought by every means in his power to do so, because the Lord was his shield. And Absalom and his rebel army were equally powerless against him, because God defended him. All the hosts of hell with their allies upon earth, even when led by their subtle and mighty prince, cannot really harm the child of God who has sought the protection of his Father.

3. *For mercy.* "Be merciful unto me, O Lord." Implied in this petition is the conscious unworthiness of the suppliant. David seeks the protection and deliverance of God, not as a right, but as a favour. He presented to God not a claim, but a humble supplication. He addressed himself not to the Divine justice, but to the Divine mercy. "Be gracious unto me, O God." In all our need it is to the mercy of the Lord we must look.

4. *For joy.* "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant." If God should deliver His servant from danger his heart would

greatly rejoice. And such were the circumstances of the Psalmist at this time that God only could deliver him from his foes and fill him with gladness. Salvation is a joyous thing. It is the Christian's privilege to "rejoice in the Lord always."

II. The pleas of the suppliant. The Psalmist pleads—

1. *His necessity.* "For I am poor and needy." Oppression and poverty are the principal meanings of the words used by the Psalmist in this plea. David pleads that he was bowed down by trouble, as he asks God to "bow down" and hear him, and that he was necessitous, as he asks God to help him. Or we may regard his plea in this way, he was "poor," i.e., without supply, he was "needy," i.e., full of wants; therefore he must look away from himself, above himself for satisfaction. Man's necessity does not give him any claim upon God's bounty. But human misery always moves Divine mercy. And when we humbly and sincerely plead our poverty with God, He will enrich us with the treasures of His grace. "When I am weak, then am I strong."

2. *His consecration.* "For I am holy." Margin: "one whom Thou favourest." Hengstenberg: "for I am pious." Calvin: "for I am meek." Perowne: "one whom Thou lovest." He was pious, not profane. He was the "servant" of God. Twice he pleads that fact; and as we are sure that he would not plead "for I am holy" in any boastful or self-righteous spirit, we conclude that his consecration to God is one of his pleas. He was the servant of God, and therefore in asking God to save him, he was asking Him to save His own. If we in the strength of grace have consecrated ourselves to God, we may plead that fact with Him in our prayers. He has never forsaken His faithful servants.

3. *His confidence.* "Thy servant that trusteth in Thee." He has pledged Himself to save those who put their trust in Him. By trusting Him we

really place our salvation in His hands. Can He fail? Is His power inadequate? His workings in nature, in human history, and in the conversion of souls proclaim it as great and wonderful as ever. Is His willingness diminished? "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Our trust in God is a mighty plea in our prayers to Him.

4. *His importunity.* "I cry unto Thee daily." Margin: "all the day,"—continually. His prayer was importunate. "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." These words show that his prayer was earnest, hearty, sincere. He did not merely lift up his hands unto God, but he lifted up his heart also. Prayers which are characterised like this by heartiness, importunity, and faith, when presented by God's devoted but needy servants, are certain to result in gracious replies from heaven.

III. The encouragement of the suppliant. "For Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon Thee." Here are—

1. *Goodness for man as a dependent and needy creature.* "Thou, Lord, art good." In Himself "God is good." He is perfect in holiness and in grace. He is also "good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." He delights in His works, and in dealing bountifully with His creatures. He, the infinitely and ever blessed God, hath assured us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" and He is the infinite Giver. Being and well-being, life and joy, He gives abundantly. Here then is encouragement to seek Him in prayer in every time of need.

2. *Mercy for man as a sinful creature.* "Ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy." "Goodness is the disposition to communicate happiness. Mercy is a modification of goodness. Goodness is the genus, mercy the species. The fruits of goodness are enjoyed by holy and happy creatures. The fruits of mercy, by the guilty and miserable. Mercy with relation to an offender is a disposition to forgive. Mercy in reference to a sufferer is a disposition to relieve." Here then is our encouragement. We are sinful and ill-deserving, but He is merciful and pardons. We are wretched, but He is merciful and succours.

3. *Mercy in great abundance and dispensed freely.* He is "ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Him." "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." "He delighteth in mercy." Like Himself His mercy is inexhaustible, infinite. And it is bestowed freely "unto all them that call upon Him." "Ask, and ye shall receive." Unless we are prepared to receive the mercy of God as a free gift, we cannot receive it at all. Here then is encouragement to seek God in our times of need. His mercy is unspeakably greater than our sin and misery, and He waits "ready" to bestow it freely "unto all them that call upon Him."

CONCLUSION.—In the great goodness and mercy of our God there is encouragement for each and for all of us to seek Him in time of need. We are poor and needy, but the riches of His grace are unsearchable and free. We are sinful and sorrowful, but He is plenteous in mercy and ready to forgive. His love is infinite.

In Him let us trust and rejoice.

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO SEEK HIM.

(Verses 6-10.)

In that portion of the Psalm which we have already considered the Psalmist encouraged himself by the willingness of God to help him; in this he encour-

ages himself by the ability of God to help him. In that the goodness and mercy of God were the ground of his prayer for deliverance; in this the

power and glory of God constitute that ground. Let us consider—

I. The supremacy of God. The Psalmist sets forth two aspects of this supremacy. He represents God as supreme—

1. *In Himself.* “Among the gods there is none like unto Thee, O Lord. Thou art God alone.” The Psalmist refers to the false deities worshipped by the heathen, and he says that none of them are like Jehovah in power and goodness. In might and majesty, in grace and glory, God is supreme. He only is God. It has been well said by Bishop Wilkins, “If God be an infinitely-perfect Being, it is impossible to imagine two such beings at the same time, because they must have several perfections, or the same. If the former, neither of them can be God, because neither of them has all possible perfections. If they have both equal perfections, neither of them can be absolutely perfect, because it is not so great to have the same equal perfections in common with another, as to be superior to all others.” There can be but one Supreme Being.

2. *In His doings.* “There are no works like unto Thy works. Thou art great and doest wondrous things.” God’s works in creation are wonderful in the wisdom and power which they manifest. And in His providence there had often been remarkable displays of His skill in making the designs of the enemies of His people promote their interests, and of His power in overthrowing His foes and saving them that trust in Him. All His works praise Him and proclaim His sole supremacy. But the doing of God which most encouraged the Psalmist was *His hearing of prayer*. “Thou wilt answer me.” It is the great glory of God that He who created the heavens and bringeth out their host by number, also regardeth the faint breathings of penitence and the softest whispers of prayer. He hears and attends to all the prayers that rise to Him. He is “the proper object of worship everywhere alike, and at all times. This is a thought,” says Dr. Wardlaw, “not less pregnant with interest than it is with wonder. When

you are desirous to present a petition in person to a fellow-creature, you require to leave your place, and to find your way to the nearer or more distant spot where he is. But whatever request you have to present to God, you need not move from the spot you occupy. Never. Wherever you chance to be He is there. This is true, not of you alone, but of all alike. He listens to the prayers and the praises of His people that are poured into His ear at the same instant, in every place and every language. And, at the same instant, too, He is listening to the songs of the ‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands’ which arise to Him around His seraph-circled throne in the heavens; and to the addresses which are offered to Him from all the worlds with which the fields of immensity are replenished. And to all these He bends His ear, with the most perfect discrimination, and at the same time with the most perfect ease, without the slightest approach to anything like difficulty or effort. And there is no mixing up of one thing with another; of any of the particulars of one case with those of another. Each case, in all its details, is as distinctly heard and recorded as if there had been no other to which to attend.” In this we have a marvellous exhibition of the supremacy of God.

II. The effects of that supremacy. Two are mentioned—

1. *All nations shall worship God.* “All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and shall glorify Thy name.” The nations of the earth are represented as *created* by God. He “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” All nations have a common origin. God is the Creator-Father of all men. Human brotherhood is a great fact, however man may disregard it. The king and the beggar have a common origin. The oppression of one man by another, or one class of men by another, is a crime in the sight of the common Maker of us all. The nations shall all come and *worship* God. “All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations

shall serve Him. . . . All nations shall call Him blessed." It is thought by some that the prediction of the text was partially fulfilled in the great number of proselytes to the Jewish religion during the reigns of David and Solomon. But its complete fulfilment is certainly yet in the future. The triumphs of Christianity are spreading. A bright future is before our world and race. God is supreme over all, and the time is coming on apace when His supremacy shall be loyally and enthusiastically acknowledged by all nations.

2. *The troubled soul shall trust in Him.* The supremacy of God encouraged the distressed Psalmist to seek Him. Such will ever be the effect of that supremacy when it is rightly understood. God is supremely good, supremely beneficent, and, while enthroned high over all things, He stoops to listen to the feeblest prayer. He is both able and willing to succour the distressed, and help the needy, and comfort the sorrowful.

"His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end."

There is every encouragement presented to the suppliant soul in drawing near to God. Oh, ye impoverished ones, come

and be enriched out of His fulness. Burdened and anxious ones, come and cast yourselves with your weight of cares upon Him who careth for you. Sinful and sorrowing ones, come in faith to God, and He will forgive your sins, and soothe or sanctify all your sorrows.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Seeing that God is supreme, let us reverence Him, serve Him.* "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

2. *Seeing that He is so compassionate to the troubled, let them seek His help and comfort.* From the highest throne in glory He will listen to your cry and hasten to your help. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

3. *Seeing that there is so sure a prospect of His universal worship, let us rejoice in spirit, and hopefully pray and work for its realisation.* "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

THE DAY OF TROUBLE.

(Verse 7.)

We have here—

I. **A period with which all men are acquainted.** "The day of trouble." Trouble is a common experience amongst men in this world. We are troubled by physical infirmities, pains, and diseases; by perplexities, cares, and losses in business; by the unfaithfulness of professed friends; by the bereavements of death; by spiritual distresses and conflicts.

1. *The individual character of trouble.* "My trouble." Our troubles often arise partly from peculiarities in our circumstances and temperament and disposition. The same events very differently affect different persons. The sorrows of no two persons are exactly alike. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness."

"Every man must bear his own burden."

2. *The limited duration of trouble.* "The day of my trouble." Through the mercy of God our troubles are short-lived. There is more of gladness than of gloom in the world. In the case of the great majority of persons suffering is the exception, not the rule of life. Courage, troubled heart, the day of thy trouble will soon be over, and happy months of peace shall be thine. Even if the whole of this earthly life were dark and sad it is but as a day when contrasted with the glad, and bright, and endless future.

II. **A resolve which all men should make.** "I will call upon Thee." The Psalmist did not stoically endure his

distresses. He was keenly sensible of their painfulness. Nor did he *impiously rebel* against God by reason of them. That, not to mention its sinfulness, would only have made the matter worse. But by prayer he took his trouble to God. We should do the same with ours. And we should do so *humbly*. It may be that our trouble is a consequence of some sin or sins of ours. Sin is the fruitful parent of suffering. Therefore we should call upon God with humble and penitent hearts. We should call upon Him *submissively*. While our object in seeking Him is to obtain relief from trouble, let us leave it to Him to impart that relief as He may choose. He may relieve us by removing the trouble. He may continue the trouble, but relieve us by imparting more grace to us that we may bear it. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

III. A result which all men may anticipate. "Thou wilt answer me." The Psalmist was confident that God would hear and answer his prayer. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." "Thou wilt answer me"—

1. *Because Thou hast promised to do so.* "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee." "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," &c. "Ask, and ye shall receive," &c.

2. *Because Thou hast done so.* Jacob prayed, and God answered and blessed him (Gen. xxxii.) Isaiah and Hezekiah prayed, and the Lord answered and cut off 185,000 Assyrians in one night (1 Kings xix.; 1 Chron. xxxii.) "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly," &c. (James v. 17, 18). The early Christians prayed instantly and earnestly, and the Lord answered, and by an angel delivered Peter out of prison (Acts xii. *et al*). What He has done, He will do again.

3. *Because of what Thou art.* Thou art omniscient, and therefore knowest our need; omnipotent, and therefore canst help us; "good, and plenteous in mercy," and therefore wilt take pleasure in relieving us, &c.

Trembling and troubled hearts seek the Lord in believing prayer; and He will calm and cheer, soothe and strengthen you.

THE FORMER MERCIES OF GOD AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO SEEK HIM.

(Verses 11-17.)

In this division of the Psalm we have—

I. A grateful recollection of former mercies. "Great is Thy mercy toward me; and Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." The word translated "*hell*" is "*sheol*," in the Greek "*Hades*." "Thou hast delivered my soul," or life, "out of deep sheol," is a poetical way of saying that God had delivered the Psalmist out of extreme dangers or deep distresses. The allusion is very probably to the repeated and remarkable deliverances vouchsafed to David in the time when Saul persecuted him and sought his life. During that persecution there were times when David despaired of his life, feeling that it was vain to hope to escape from the cunning and strength that were put forth against him. Yet God had graciously and marvelously preserved him safely. He

regarded this deliverance as a Divine "*mercy*." He knew that he had no claim upon the protection of God. He felt that he had not deserved the great favours which God had bestowed upon him. The Christian may use these words in a spiritual sense. "Great is Thy mercy toward me; and Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." When God in mercy saves a soul He saves it from sin, death, and hell. This recollection of past mercy was an encouragement to the Psalmist in his present distress. It would keep before his mind—1. *God's ability to deliver him.* He had saved him in former times, therefore He, the unchangeable One, could save him now. 2. *God's willingness to save him.*

"His love in time past
Forbids me to think," &c.

Memories like this of the Psalmist's are amongst the most helpful and precious of all our possessions.

II. An earnest prayer for deliverance from present danger. The great object of the prayer was that the Psalmist might be delivered from the enemies that were aiming at his life. "O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set Thee before them. . . . Save the son of Thine handmaid." The foes from whom he sought deliverance were "*proud*." They were men of haughty spirit and daring ambition, who would despise the welfare or the right of others if they stood in the way of the accomplishment of their projects. They were "*violent*." They wrought out their plans by force. They were fierce and cruel, caring not what violence they used in accomplishing their ambitious designs. They were *united*. Hengstenberg translates—"The band of the violent." And Barnes says—"The word *assembly* here means merely that they were banded together; what was done was the result of a conspiracy or combination." They were *irreligious*. They had not set God before them. They did not fear Him, or respect His law. His threatenings they despised; His presence and observation they disregarded. What evils might not be expected from enemies such as these? From such enemies David prays for deliverance. "Save the son of Thine handmaid." In his prayer he sets forth the desired deliverance—1. *As a mercy*. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me." He asks that God would favourably regard him, pity him, and relieve him. 2. *As a communication of Divine power*. "Give Thy strength unto Thy servant." He regarded his case as requiring nothing less than the strength of God to meet it. And he asks that he may be enabled to act as if he were nerved with the very power of God. 3. *As found in obedience to the Divine will*. "Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name." The Psalmist felt that if deliverance were to come to him, he must be found in the way

of the Divine precepts, walking with God, and serving Him with undivided heart. It cannot be too earnestly insisted upon, that, if we would be saved, we must be found walking in the way which God prescribes for us. "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." Nor can we insist too earnestly upon the necessity of whole-heartedness in the service of God. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." In the Christian life and work we need fixedness of purpose and concentration of effort if we would succeed. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." "This one thing I do," &c. 4. *As calculated to produce a favourable impression*. To the Psalmist himself his deliverance would be a "token for good," a clear and unmistakable sign of the favour of God. To the enemies of the Psalmist his deliverance would be a rebuke. By it their purposes would be defeated, their schemes frustrated, and themselves humbled and shamed. Thus David prays to God for deliverance, and encourages himself in so doing, by thinking of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Having mentioned the haughtiness and violence, the unity and irreligiousness of his foes, he says, "But Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." The Psalmist felt that he had nothing but evil to expect from his enemies. And from so gracious a God, he, though unworthy, could expect nothing but good. (We have already looked at "The goodness of God as an encouragement to seek Him"—vers. 1-5.)

III. A devout resolution to serve God. The Psalmist resolves to serve God—1. *By obedience*. "I will walk in Thy truth;" i.e., I will conform my life to Thy will. The truth of God should not only be held by us as sentiment, or doctrine, or fact; but should also be practised by us. We should translate our creed into our conduct. We should seek not only to hold the truth, but also to live the truth; not only to know the will of God, but also to do His will. The "doer of the work shall be blessed in his doing." 2. *By worship*. "I will praise Thee, O Lord

my God, with all my heart ; and I will glorify Thy name for evermore." The poet resolves to worship God *heartily*. "With all my heart." When God united his heart he would pour it all out in worship to Him. His undivided affection and adoration he would give to God. Such hearty worship is acceptable unto God. He would worship God *eternally*—"for evermore." While he had any being he would praise God. In time and through eternity he would glorify Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Learn the value of sacred memories.* How greatly David was encouraged by his recollections of

past mercies ! Such memories should be monitors, reminding us of our weakness, &c. Such memories should be inspirers, telling us of Divine strength, goodness, &c. He who does not use wisely the memories of the past is not living as he ought in the present, and is ill-furnished for the changes and trials of the future. 2. *The obligations imposed by Divine mercies.* Goodness calls for gratitude. New favours demand new songs. Our obligations to God are ever increasing. "I will praise Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart ; and I will glorify Thy name for evermore."

THE DIVINE WAY FOR MAN.

(Verse 11.)

I. The Divine way for man indicated by God. "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." 1. *There is a Divine way in which man should walk.* "Thy way." The way prescribed by Him in His holy Word. The way of obedience to His precepts. The way which our Lord Jesus Christ trod. 2. *God must indicate that way to man.* "Teach me." "The original meaning of the Hebrew word is to point out, or mark the way." The way is clearly revealed in the sacred Scriptures ; but man's moral perceptions are not clear, his moral judgment is warped by sin ; hence his need of the direction of God. He must indicate to man the true way of human life.

II. The Divine way for man trod by man. "I will walk in Thy truth." It is the way of Divine truth which God points out, and which the Psalmist resolves to walk in. To walk in God's truth implies—1. *Harmony with the truth.* "To walk in the truth of God signifies to be always mindful of it." "Walking, in the Scripture, takes in the whole of our conversation or conduct." The whole life in accord with the Divine mind and will. 2. *Progress in the truth.* The Psalmist resolves to walk, not to stand, in God's truth. Walking implies advancement. The godly soul "follows on to know the Lord." We must advance in two things:

in *knowledge* of the truth, and in *practice* of the truth.

III. The need of integrity of heart to tread the Divine way for man. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." We use the word integrity in its literal meaning. 1. *There is a great tendency in human nature to division of heart.* There are many rival claimants for our affections ; and the heart itself has lost its true centre. 2. *Integrity of heart is essential to enable us to tread the Divine way.* "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Unless we are whole-hearted we shall speedily wander from the way, or faint by the way. God demands our undivided affection and our complete devotion. Only by hearty and concentrated effort can we secure the prize. "One thing I do, forgetting," &c. 3. *God alone can impart to us integrity of heart in the Divine way.* The bias of the unrenewed heart is averse from Divine things. None but God can harmonise our powers and affections in His service. He will thus unite the hearts of all who sincerely seek Him.

"Let earth no more my heart divide ;
With Christ may I be crucified ;

To Thee with my whole soul aspire ;
Dead to the world and all its toys,
Its idle pomp and fading joys,
Be Thou alone my one desire."

—C. Wesley.

PSALM LXXXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

Superscription.—"A Psalm or Song for the sons of Korah." It so far combines the properties of a religious *Psalm* and a patriotic *song* that either of the names may with propriety be applied to it. "*For the sons of Korah*," see Introduction to Psalm xlii. The Psalm was either composed by them, or given to them to sing in the Temple service.

Occasion.—Hengstenberg argues very forcibly, if not quite conclusively, that the occasion of its composition was the joyful events under Hezekiah,—the destruction by the angel of the Lord of one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians of the army of Sennacherib, which was before Jerusalem, and the consequent deliverance of Jerusalem from the siege and capture threatened by Sennacherib (2 Kings xix.; 2 Chron. xxxii. 1-23).

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

In this brief and joyous Psalm, the poet celebrates the praise of the Church of the Most High. In so doing, he shows us some of the things in which her glory consisted. The Church of God is—

I. Glorious in her sanctity. "His foundation is in the *holy* mountains." The sanctity of Mount Zion consisted in its being chosen by God as the abode of His Church; and the "mountains" (plural) are said to be "holy" because Zion is part of a mountain range. Zion was holy as being the dwelling-place of God. The Church of God upon earth is glorious in so far as she is holy, and she is holy in so far as God dwells in her. "A glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." God hath chosen the members of His Church "that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love." "Holiness is inward glory. Glory is conspicuous holiness." The Church is called to be separate from the world. Its members are called to be saints. Christ our great exemplar is perfectly holy. And His redemption is from sin to holiness. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

II. Glorious in her security. "His foundation is in the holy mountains. . . . The Highest Himself shall establish her." Jerusalem was "a mountain city, . . . enthroned as compared with Jericho or Damascus, Gaza or Tyre, on

a mountain fastness. In this respect, it concentrated in itself the character of the whole country of which it was to be the capital,—the 'mountain throne,' the 'mountain sanctuary' of God. 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever.' 'God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed.' It was emphatically the lair of the lion of Judah, of 'Ariel,' the Lion of God. 'In Judah is God known; His name is great in Israel. In Salem is His leafy covert, and His rocky den in Zion.' . . . 'Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of the robbers.' And this wild and fastness-like character of Jerusalem was concentrated yet again in the fortress, the 'stronghold' of Zion. That point, the highest in the city, the height which most readily catches the eye from every quarter, is emphatically the 'hill fort,' the 'rocky hold' of Jerusalem—the refuge where first the Jebusite and then the Lion of God stood at bay against the hunters."—*Stanley*. The foundations of the holy city were high and firm, and on nearly every side it was guarded by the ancient mountains. So the Church of God is secure. The city of Zion has gone. The Temple at Jerusalem is no more; but the Church of God, which the Highest has established, remains and prospers. The Church is founded upon the rock of Divine truth, and all the raging storms of earth and hell cannot shake her. The Church is guarded by God Himself, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail

against it." Can infinite wisdom be baffled? Can Almightyness be overcome? Can the word of the Unchangeable fail? Then the Church of God is inviolably secure.

III. Glorious in being beloved by God. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." When Sennacherib and his host were encamped before the city, the Lord suffered them not to pass the gates though "all the rest of the country was subject to their sway," and while the gates remained safe, the whole city was safe. God loved Jacob much, but He loved Zion more. He loves the worship of His people in their homes much, but He loves their worship in His sanctuary more. "A father is glad to see any one of his children, and makes him welcome when he visits him, but much more when they come together; the greatest feast is when they all meet at his house. The public praises of the Church are the emblem of heaven itself, where all the angels make but one concert." *This love of God for His Church should lead every believer—1. To seek union with the Church. 2. To esteem the worship of the Church a solemn duty and precious privilege. 3. To unite in that worship with deep humility, profound reverence, and great delight.* He who "loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" is present in His Church, and is well pleased to accept the spiritual worship of sincere worshippers.

IV. Glorious in her exalted reputation. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." Many glorious things were spoken of Mount Zion as to *its situation*. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion," &c. As *being inhabited by God*. "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." As to the *diffusion of religion from it* (Isa. ii. 3). The city and temple passed away, but true religion has spread widely, and is still doing so. The Church of God has an exalted reputation—

gence. The revealed mind and will of God on the most important of all questions, as contained in the Sacred Writings, is given into her keeping. "We have the mind of Christ."

2. *As animated by the Divinest spirit.* The true Church of God is composed only of those who "have the spirit of Christ." He came "not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom." The spirit of self-surrendering love actuates every member of the Church of God.

3. *As engaged in the most useful and glorious work.* Its members, in their measure, go forth to seek and to save the lost. They labour to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," to abolish sin and suffering, to establish holiness and joy, and to make the moral wastes break forth into beauty and fragrance and fruitfulness.

V. Glorious in her increase. This increase is—

1. *Variously composed.* "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this was born there." Some regard these as the words of God Himself, and translate, "I announce Rahab and Babylon as those that know Me," &c. But with either rendering the idea is, that converts to the Church of God would be added from those nations. Hengstenberg expresses what we regard as the true idea: "At the time when these hopes were expressed, the number of the members of the Church of God had been very much melted down. The ten tribes had already been led away into captivity, and Judah remained alone in the land. In these circumstances, the longing after the fulfilment of the old promises of a posterity to Abraham as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea, must have been awakened with peculiar power, and must have seized with especial ardour upon everything, such as the above-mentioned events in the time of Hezekiah, which furnished a foundation on which such a hope could rest, and brought into view a compensation for the loss of Israel in the coming in of the heathen." These

foreign nations are here set forth as actually incorporated by a new birth into the Church of God. Even the worst enemies of the Jews, Egypt and Babylon, are regarded as citizens of Zion. God Himself acknowledges and registers them as such. The grand fulfilment of this splendid hope is found in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Many shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." They are coming from all nations into His kingdom, and they shall continue to come until all the nations of the earth loyally submit to Him.

2. *Distinguished in character.* "This and that man was born in her." The word translated *man* is *אִישׁ* = *avîš* = *vir*, a man of eminence. Men of distinguished ability and excellence shall be born in the Church. The most illustrious names in the annals of the world are those of men who have been members of the spiritual Zion. The Church of God has been, and still is, the abode of the men most renowned for knowledge and wisdom, for patience and courage, for tenderness and truth, for piety and usefulness, for independence and reverence.

3. *Registered by God.* "The Lord shall count when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there." In the great census the Lord will clearly distinguish those who were born in Zion. The Divine registration is infallible. There are no mistakes in it.

None but the true citizens of Zion will be found "written in the Lamb's book of life." And the name of no true citizen will be omitted.

VI. *Glorious in the joy which her supplies produce.* "As well the singers as the players on instruments: all my springs are in thee." This verse is generally acknowledged to be a very difficult one. Various interpretations of it have been propounded. The idea seems to us to be that the citizens of Zion rejoice with music and song in the fountains of refreshment and blessing which are found in Zion. The streams which make glad the city of God are found there. How abundant and rich and free are the provisions which God has given to us in His Church! We have there the helpful communion of saints, the dispensation of the treasures of the truth of God by the Christian ministry, the exalting and sanctifying and blessed exercise of worship, and the participation in the Divine sacraments. In the work and worship of the Church of God "with joy we draw water out of the wells of salvation."

CONCLUSION.—1. *Are we born into the Church of God? Are we citizens of the spiritual Zion? Are our names in the heavenly register? Registration in the records of the Church on earth will avail us nothing, unless our names "are written in the Lamb's book of life."* 2. *If we are citizens of Zion, let us rejoice in the honour and privilege; for, as such, we are members of the most glorious society.*

PUBLIC WORSHIP MORE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD THAN PRIVATE DEVOTION.

(Verses 1, 2.)

Man has the *capacity* to worship God, and as God reveals Himself man is under *obligation* to worship Him. To be acceptable to God, this worship must be the tribute of free and sincere affection. Wherever such an offering is made, whether in the secret chamber, at the family altar, or in the public sanctuary, it is "a spiritual sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." It also sends back into the heart of the worshipper that joy

and peace which are unspeakable and full of glory. But public worship is more lovely in the sight of God than private worship.

I. Adduce some facts in the Divine administration indicative of God's higher estimate of public worship.

1. *The facts of the Divine institution of public worship.* The Sabbath is favourable for all religious worship. But, when God gave special ordinances

to His ancient people, conspicuous amongst them all was this solemn institution of public worship. Three periods in the year were assigned as seasons of holy convocation, &c. In addition to these more conspicuous solemnities, there were the public services for the new moons, the year of rest, and the year of jubilee. Moreover, each day at the Temple was the morning and evening sacrifice offered, &c. . . . In the fact that God thus instituted public worship, we read His higher appreciation of it.

2. *The fact that on special occasions public homage to God has been specially demanded, indicates His high pleasure in it.* Many instances occur in the history of God's dealings with His people when some special interposition was followed by as special a requisition for the public acknowledgment of His supremacy and authority as their Lord and Sovereign. . . . On occasions like these the elders were commanded to "proclaim a fast, to call a solemn assembly," &c. So also when there had been a special deliverance from pestilence, or famine, or, &c. ; or when there had been remarkable providential bounties, the whole nation was called to public thanksgiving, &c.

3. *The fact that the ordinance of public worship is perpetuated under the Christian dispensation.* The example of inspired apostles and primitive saints is left on record, in relation to their frequent "coming together in one place" and "with one accord;" and the solemn injunction given as applicable to all ages "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together," &c. These facts abundantly indicate God's higher regard for it.

II. State some reasons why, in the nature of the case, God should prefer public to private worship.

1. *Public worship is attended with greater sacrifices.* That piety is best which will make the greatest sacrifices. That faith or love is the strongest which will bear the greatest strain. In proportion as the sacrifice of public exceeds that of private worship is the service of the former more acceptable to God than the latter. It is a higher expression of

your piety. It is a brighter test of your faith and love.

2. *It exerts a more powerful and extensive moral influence.* The influence of regular secret prayer upon the heart and life of a Christian is very great. So also is the influence of morning and evening family worship. But, in the public courts of the Lord, there are many influences flowing in upon the soul, and many emotions are there awakened, which can never spring out of the devotions of the closet or the family. The sanctuary is emphatically "the house of God and the gate of heaven." The Christian's graces kindle anew in Christian communion, as the coals glow with increasing light and heat when brought into contact.

3. *It stands connected with the most signal displays of the power of Divine truth.* Nowhere upon earth has this two-fold work of the Spirit, in comforting the saint and convincing the sinner, been so signally effected as in connection with the solemnities of public worship. It is in the house of God, when the quick and searching words of Divine truth have been applied with wise discrimination, and urged upon the conscience with faithful and affectionate importunity, that the sinner has been the most thoroughly arrested in his course, and made the most to feel himself alone with his God, and most vividly to anticipate the coming scenes of the judgment and the awful issues of the final sentence. Yes, and here also the voice of mercy has fallen upon the ear of penitential sorrow, with the most melting, soothing tenderness, and filled the contrite bosom with new joys and peace, unknown in any other place but heaven.

4. *It is the grand instrumentality for perpetuating and extending the Church.* The light of this day of Christian activity and benevolence would go out in darkness, ere our generation had passed, were the sanctuary to be deserted, and all manifestations of devotion to be shut up within the family and the closet. How direct is the tendency to all that is good in the ordinances of public worship! Keep up

this agency in its purity and strength, and civil and social and religious blessings abound; but, as you abolish this agency, religion droops and virtue fails, the dark passions of the depraved heart rage unchecked till the judgments of heaven cut short the rebellion and impiety in hopeless desolation.

5. *It is most like heaven.* The worship of heaven is pure and perfect, and also united and public, devotion. The place on earth the most like to heaven, is the house of God on the Christian Sabbath, filled with sincere and humble

worshippers. Nowhere shall you come so near heaven in all its glory as when you enter the sacred courts of the Lord, and mingle your prayers and praises with His children, while He bows His ear to hearken.

INFERENCES.—1. *All the arrangements for public worship should be amply and cheerfully provided.* 2. *A regular attendance upon public worship is demanded.* 3. *Yield to the influence and instructions here imparted.*—Rev. L. P. Hickok, D.D. Abridged from “*The Preachers’ Treasury.*”

GLORIOUS THINGS SPOKEN OF THE CHURCH.

(Verse 3.)

Here we have an expressive testimony in favour of the Church. Let us illustrate and improve the subject.

I. **Let us illustrate it.** What glorious things are spoken of her? She is commended—

1. *As having Jehovah Himself for her founder.* She became a city through His love, mercy, wisdom, and grace.

2. *As having the ark of His presence dwelling in her.* To the saints He vouchsafes most delightful displays of His excellency and brightness; most captivating views of His glory.

3. *As having the solemnities of His worship performed there.* In this city, God is worshipped in spirit and in truth; worshipped in the beauty of holiness.

4. *As having His laws to govern her.* The laws of God are holy, just, and good; and all are found in the written revelation He has given us.

5. *As having constant supplies from Him.* The community is a great one; but they are richly clothed, well fed, and kindly nourished.

6. *As having His immediate and constant protection.* She is surrounded on every side by Him; and, guarding her night and day, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.”

II. **Let us improve it.** We may learn—

1. *In what light we ought to regard the Church.* On account of the poverty of her members, and the fewness of their number, her glory is scarcely at all seen, but, notwithstanding her visible aspect, she is yet most beautiful, most glorious (Ps. l. 2; Isa. lx. 18).

2. *What reason for thankfulness we have if we are enrolled her citizens.* In comparison of this all else should be esteemed by us as “dung and dross.”

3. *How much we should exert ourselves to advance her interests.* In reference to her, a glorious period is predicted (Isa. lx. 1–14); and this we should long for and help forward by all means within our power to adopt (Isa. lxii. 1, 6, 7).—W. Steigh.

REGENERATION.

(Verse 6.)

From these words we may derive some instructive and useful remarks. Let us attend to the following—

I. **It is highly important to every man to be regenerated.** This will appear by considering the language of

our Lord respecting it (John iii. 5–7); the degeneracy of our nature (Eph. ii. 1); the nature and design of the Gospel dispensation; the relation of the present to another world; the capacity of the soul for enjoyment or suffering; and

the unsuitableness of the character of an unregenerate person for future happiness (Luke xvi. 24, 25).

II. The present is the only state in which this momentous change can be accomplished. Death makes no change of a moral kind in man;—his probation terminates on his leaving the present world (2 Cor. vi. 2; Rev. xxii. 11), and all beyond is awarded according to character (Matt. xvi. 27; Rev. xxii. 12).

III. Regeneration is not a fancy or dream, but a reality. Its existence is evinced in the phraseology by which it is described (1 John v. 1; 2 Cor. v. 17); in the accounts given of the first Christians of their having actually undergone a spiritual birth (Rom. vi. 11–13; Eph. ii. 4–6); and in the present experience of all believers, who are themselves living witnesses to the truth of this doctrine (2 Cor. v. 17; Col. iii. 1).

IV. The Holy Spirit is the agent in the regeneration of men. Our own state and character before the change takes place, the images used to describe it, and the positive declarations of Scripture if duly considered will convince us of this (John i. 12, iii. 4; Eph. ii. 8–10; 1 John iii. 9).

V. Though the Spirit can do this immediately, yet He generally does it in the use of the means. Those means are chiefly His written Word (Ps. cxix. 93; James i. 18; the ministry of the Gospel (2 Cor. v. 18–20; 1 Thess. i. 5); and prayer (Isa. xlv. 19; Ezek. xxxvi. 37).

VI. It is not every one that thinks he is regenerated that is really so. We are not spiritually born merely because we have been baptized, nor because we have correct views of religion, nor because we observe certain rites, nor yet because our lives are reformed. Regeneration is widely different from these things, and those who rest satisfied with these are mistaking the shadow for the substance.

VII. Zion, or the Church, is honoured as the birthplace of the saints. This is that to which our attention is called in the words of our text. It is because of this, amongst the many things spoken of her, that she stands so high in the estimation of God and man (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14, cxxxvii. 5, 6).

VIII. The work of regeneration is made apparent by its effects and evidences. Such are—deliverance from sin (1 John iii. 9, v. 18); victory over the world (Rom. xii. 2; 1 John v. 4, 5); spirituality of mind (John iii. 6; Rom. viii. 5, 14); love to the saints (1 John iv. 7); submission to Christ (John vi. 45; 1 John v. 1); true obedience (1 John ii. 29); and hope (1 Pet. i. 3; 1 John iii. 2, 3).

And now, am I myself the subject of this change? Have I already experienced it? Am I born of God? Am I decidedly a new creature? If my best interests be deemed worthy of my attention, these questions cannot be improper; nor can I too seriously apply them to myself.—*W. Sleight.*

THE FOUNT OF BLESSING.

(Verse 7.)

“All my springs are in Thee.”

Consider—

I. What is meant by the pronoun “Thee.” The Psalmist meant *Zion*. All his springs were in *Zion*. From the time of Constantine to the present the name *Zion* has been applied to the western hill on which the city of Jerusalem stands. But anciently, and down to the time of the destruction of the city by Titus, the name *Zion* was applied exclusively to the eastern hill on

which the Temple stood. So it was in *Zion* as being the place on which the Temple stood that the Psalmist found his springs. In this light, the significance of the Psalm is at once manifest. To the devout Jew *Zion* was the abode of joy and blessing, the place of special Divine manifestation, and of special communion with God, who is represented as dwelling there (Ps. lxxxi. 1, cxxxii. 13, 14).

In this Christian age, there is not one

sacred place, for all places are sacred. Not one local mercy-seat, for Christ is the universal mercy-seat,—the meeting-place between God and man. The Jew found all his springs in the Temple, because by means of its ordinances he realised the presence and obtained the blessing of God. To us, “Christ is the true temple; all our springs are in Him, and from Him all our streams flow.” But Christ is Himself the gift of God to us. So God is the primal fount of blessing. And through Christ we rise to God, commune with God, &c. So *all our springs are in God*. We trace all our blessings to the heavenly Father. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” &c.

II. The number and variety of the springs from which we are drawing. *How numerous are they!* The sun, the atmosphere, the earth, &c.; society, books, &c.; many spiritual ministries, the communion of saints, religious worship, the comfort, and guidance and sanctification of the Spirit, the example and sympathy and sacrifice of the Saviour, and the great love of our Father, which is the fountain from which all other blessings flow.

How various also are they! Varied to suit the many needs of our complex nature in all our various circumstances and moods. When the heart overruns with joy, the joyousness of the ever-blessed God is adapted to our need, and so we delight to approach Him. When the heart is crushed with grief, the tenderness and compassion of Him who pitieth as a father and comforteth as a mother are the balm that heals us.

The number and variety of our needs are evidence of the greatness of our nature. Only great natures have great requirements. God has made us for

Himself, and nothing less than Himself can satisfy the cravings of our soul.

III. The blessedness of having all our springs in God. “All my springs are in Thee;” then, *they are all-sufficient. They will meet every variety of need.* For the perplexed student, conscious of ignorance, and crying for light, there is an inexhaustible spring of knowledge and guidance. For the worn and wearied sufferer, sighing for rest and comfort, there are springs of patience and solace, and even joy. For the Christian, conscious of weakness and imperfection, there are springs of power and inspiration and hope. For the penitent sinner, sorrowing over a dark past, mourning his sin, there are springs of pardon and peace and purity.

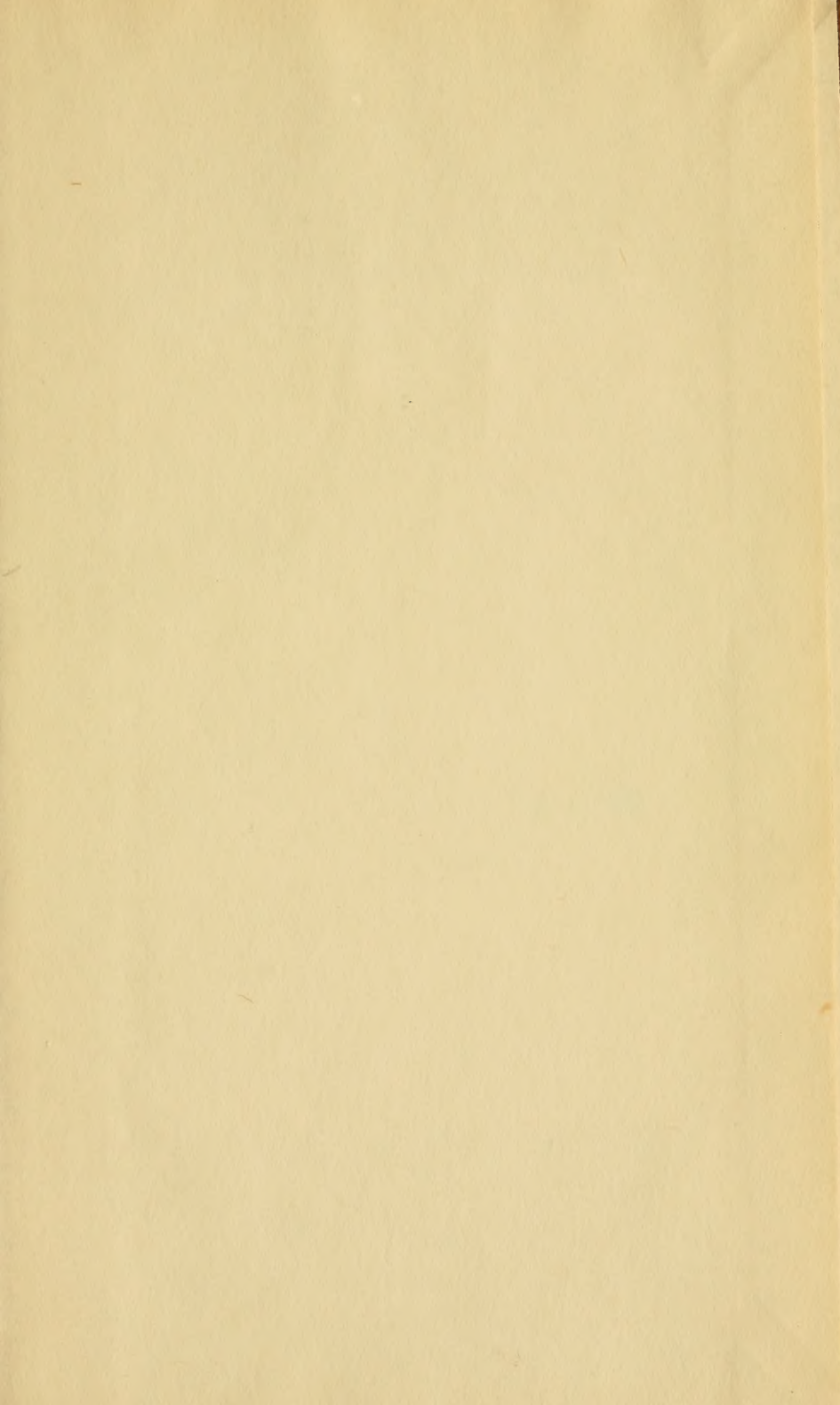
These springs are *inexhaustible*. They are as full and as fresh now as ever they were. Exhaust the solar fires, exhaust the ocean, &c. But you cannot exhaust the Infinite. Our springs are all in God, so they cannot fail; in God, then, they will meet all our thirst for evermore.

Our springs being in God, *we may draw from them liberally and joyfully, because God is infinitely generous.* “He giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not.” His generosity is as great as His resources: both are infinite as Himself. He delights in imparting joy and blessing to man. I rejoice that all my springs are in God. Let us learn to practise more fully than hitherto these two things—1. *Adoring gratitude to God.* 2. *Joyous trust in God.* Come what may, our resources cannot fail.

O God, the fount of blessing,

Our springs are all in Thee:
And though life's cares are pressing,
Weakness our soul possessing,
Our prayers to Thee addressing,
And looking for Thy blessing,

We find our springs in Thee.

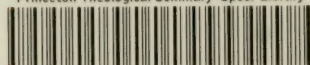


[illegible]

BS1151 .P922 19 v.1

The preacher's commentary on the book of

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00067 7619